GROWTH OF THE SOIL II

KNUT HAMSUN

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Growth of the Soil

Knut Hamsun

by W. W. Worster

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Translated from the Norwegian of

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Chapter I

SELLANRAA is no longer a desolate spot in in the waste; human beings live here — seven of them, counting great and small. But in the little time the haymaking lasted there came a stranger or so, folk wanting to see the mowing-machine. Brede Olsen was first, of course, but Axel Ström came, too, and other neighbours from lower down — ay, from right down in the village. And from across the hills came Oline, the imperishable Oline.

This time, too, she brought news with her from her own village; 'twas not Oline's way to come empty of gossip. Old Sivert's affairs had been gone into, his accounts reckoned up, and the fortune remaining after him come to nothing. Nothing!

Here Oline pressed her lips together and looked from one to another. Well, was there not a sigh — would not the roof fall down? Eleseus was the first to smile.

"Let's see — you're called after your Uncle Sivert, aren't you?" he asked softly.

And little Sivert answered as softly again:

"That's so. But I made you a present of all that might come to me after him."

"And how much was it?"

" Between five and ten thousand."

" *Daler?* " cried Eleseus suddenly, mimicking his brother.

Oline, no doubt, thought this ill-timed jesting. Oh, she had herself been cheated of her due; for all that she had managed to squeeze out something like real tears over old Sivert's grave. Eleseus should know best what he himself had written — so-and-so much to Oline, to be a comfort and support in her declining years. And where was that support? Oh, a broken reed!

Poor Oline, they might have left her something — single golden gleam in her life! Oline was not over-blessed with this world's goods. Practised in evil — ay, well used to edging her way by tricks and little meannesses from day to day; strong only as a scandalmonger, as one whose tongue was to be feared; ay, so. But nothing could have made her worse than before; least of all a pittance left her by the dead. She had toiled all her life, had borne children, and taught them her own few arts; begged for them, maybe stolen for them, but always managing for them somehow — a mother in her poor way. Her powers were not less than those of other politicians; she acted for herself and those belonging to her, set her speech according to the moment, and gained her end, earning a cheese or a handful of wool each time; she also could live and die in commonplace insincerity and readiness of wit. Oline — maybe old Sivert had for a moment thought of her as young, pretty, and rosy-cheeked, but now she

is old, deformed, a picture of decay; she ought to have been dead. Where is she to be buried? She has no family vault of her own; nay, she will be lowered down in a graveyard to lie among the bones of strangers and unknown; ay, to that she comes at last — Oline, born and died. She had been young once. A pittance left to her now, at the eleventh hour? Ay, a single golden gleam, and this slave-woman's hands would have been folded for a moment. Justice would have overtaken her with its late reward; for that she had begged for her children, maybe stolen for them, but always managed for them some way. A moment — and the darkness would reign in her as before; her eyes glower, her fingers feel out graspingly — how much? she would say. What, no more? she would say. She would be right again. A mother many times, realizing life — it was worthy of a great reward.

But all went otherwise. Old Sivert's accounts had appeared more or less in order after Eleseus had been through them; but the farm and the cow, the fishery and nets were barely enough to cover the deficit. And it was due in some measure to Oline that things had turned out no worse; so earnest was she in trying to secure a small remainder for herself that she dragged to light forgotten items that she, as gossip and newsmonger for years, remembered still, or matters outstanding which others would have passed over on purpose, to avoid causing unpleasantness to respectable fellow-citizens. Oh, that Oline! And she did not even say a word

against old Sivert now; he had made his will in kindness of heart, and there would have been a plenty after him, but that the two men sent by the Department to arrange things had cheated her. But one day all would come to the ears of the Almighty, said Oline threateningly.

Strange, she found nothing ridiculous in the fact that she was mentioned in the will; after all, it was an honour of a sort; none of her likes were named there with her!

The Sellanraa folk took the blow with patience; they were not altogether unprepared. True, Inger could not understand it — Uncle Sivert that had always been so rich. . . .

" He might have stood forth an upright man and a wealthy before the Lamb and before the Throne," said Oline, " if they hadn't robbed him."

Isak was standing ready to go out to his fields, and Oline said: " Pity you've got to go now, Isak; then I shan't see the new machine, after all. You've got a new machine, they say? "

" Ay."

" Ay, there's talk of it about, and how it cuts quicker than a hundred scythes. And what haven't you got, Isak, with all your means and riches! Priest, our way, he's got a new plough with two handles; but what's he, compared with you, and I'd tell him so to his face."

" Sivert here'll show you the machine; he's better at working her than his father," said Isak, and went out.

Isak went out. There is an auction to be held at Breidablik that noon, and he is going; there's but just time to get there now. Not that Isak any longer thinks of buying the place, but the auction — it is the first auction held there in the wilds, and it would be strange not to go.

He gets down as far as Maaneland and sees Barbro, and would pass by with only a greeting, but Barbro calls to him and asks if he is going down. "Ay," said Isak, making to go on again. It is her home that is being sold, and that is why he answers shortly.

"You going to the sale?" she asks.

"To the sale? Well, I was only going down a bit. What you've done with Axel?"

"Axel? Nay, I don't know. He's gone down to sale. Doubt he'll be seeing his chance to pick up something for nothing, like the rest."

Heavy to look at was Barbro now — ay, and sharp and bitter-tongued!

The auction has begun; Isak hears the Lensmand calling out, and sees a crowd of people. Coming nearer, he does not know them all; there are some from other villages, but Brede is fussing about, in his best finery, and chattering in his old way. "*Goddag,* Isak. So you're doing me the honour to come and see my auction sale. Thanks, thanks. Ay, we've been neighbours and friends these many years now, and never an ill word between us." Brede grows pathetic. "Ay, 'tis strange to think of leaving a place where you've lived and toiled and

grown fond of. But what's a man to do when it's fated so to be?"

"Maybe 'twill be better for you after," says Isak comfortingly.

"Why," says Brede, grasping at it himself, "to tell the truth, I think it will. I'm not regretting it, not a bit. I won't say I've made a fortune on the place here, but that's to come, maybe; and the young ones getting older and leaving the nest — ay, 'tis true the wife's got another on the way; but for all that . . ." And suddenly Brede tells his news straight out: "I've given up the telegraph business."

"What?" asks Isak.

"I've given up that telegraph."

"Given up the telegraph?"

"Ay, from new year to be. What was the good of it, anyway? And supposing I was out on business, or driving for the Lensmand or the doctor, then to have to look after the telegraph first of all — no, there's no sense nor meaning in it that way. Well enough for them that's time to spare. But running over hill and dale after a telegraph wire for next to nothing wages, 'tis no job that for Brede. And then, besides, I've had words with the people from the telegraph office about it — they've been making a fuss again."

The Lensmand keeps repeating the bids for the farm; they have got up to the few hundred *Kroner* the place is judged to be worth, and the bidding goes slowly, now, with but five or ten *Kroner* more each time.

"Why, surely—'tis Axel there's bidding," cries Brede suddenly, and hurries eagerly across. "What, you going to take over my place too? Haven't you enough to look after?"

"I'm bidding for another man," says Axel evasively.

"Well, well, 'tis no harm to me, 'twasn't that I meant."

The Lensmand raises his hammer, a new bid is made, a whole hundred *Kroner* at once; no one bids higher, the Lensmand repeats the figure again and again, waits for a moment with his hammer raised, and then strikes.

Whose bid?

Axel Ström — on behalf of another.

The Lensmand notes it down: Axel Ström as agent.

"Who's that you buying for?" asks Brede. "Not that it's any business of mine, of course, but . . ."

But now some men at the Lensmand's table are putting their heads together; there is a representative from the Bank, the storekeeper has sent his assistant; there is something the matter; the creditors are not satisfied. Brede is called up, and Brede, careless and light-hearted, only nods and is agreed —"but who'd ever have thought it didn't come up to more?" says he. And suddenly he raises his voice and declares to all present:

"Seeing as we've an auction holding anyhow, and I've troubled the Lensmand all this way, I'm willing

to sell what I've got here on the place: the cart, live stock, a pitchfork, a grindstone. I've no use for the things now; we'll sell the lot!"

Small bidding now. Brede's wife, careless and light-hearted as himself, for all the fulness of her in front, has begun selling coffee at a table. She finds it amusing to play at shop, and smiles; and when Brede himself comes up for some coffee, she tells him jestingly that he must pay for it like the rest. And Brede actually takes out his lean purse and pays. "There's a wife for you," he says to the others. "Thrifty, what?"

The cart is not worth much — it has stood too long uncovered in the open; but Axel bids a full five *Kroner* more at last, and gets the cart as well. After that Axel buys no more, but all are astonished to see that cautious man buying so much as he has.

Then came the animals. They had been kept in their shed today, so as to be there in readiness. What did Brede want with live stock when he had no farm to keep them on? He had no cows; he had started farming with two goats, and had now four. Besides these, there were six sheep. No horse.

Isak bought a certain sheep with flat ears. When Brede's children led it out from the shed, he started bidding at once, and people looked at him. Isak from Sellanraa was a rich man, in a good position, with no need of more sheep than he had. Brede's wife stops selling coffee for a moment, and says: "Ay, you may buy her, Isak; she's old, 'tis true, but

she's two and three lambs every blessed year, and that's the truth."

"I know it," said Isak, looking straight at her. "I've seen that sheep before."

He walks up with Axel Ström on the way back, leading his sheep on a string. Axel is taciturn, seemingly anxious about something, whatever it might be. There's nothing he need be troubled about that one can see, thinks Isak; his crops are looking well, most of his fodder is housed already, and he has begun timbering his house. All as it should be with Axel Ström; a thought slowly, but sure in the end. And now he had got a horse.

"So you've bought Brede's place?" said Isak. "Going to work it yourself?"

"No, not for myself. I bought it for another man."

"Ho!"

"What d'you think; was it too much I gave for it?"

"Why, no. 'Tis good land for a man that'll work it as it should."

"I bought it for a brother of mine up in Helgeland."

"Ho!"

"Then I thought perhaps I'd half a mind to change with him, too."

"Change with him — would you?"

"And perhaps how Barbro she'd like it better that way."

"Ay, maybe," said Isak.

They walk on for a good way in silence. Then says Axel:

"They've been after me to take over that telegraph business."

"The telegraph? H'm. Ay, I heard that Brede he's given it up."

"H'm," says Axel, smiling. "'Tis not so much that way of it, but Brede that's been turned off."

"Ay, so," says Isak, and trying to find some excuse for Brede. "It takes a deal of time to look after, no doubt."

"They gave him notice to the new year, if he didn't do better."

"H'm."

"You don't think it'd be worth my while to take it?"

Isak thought for a long while, and answered: "Ay, there's the money, true, but still . . ."

"They've offered me more."

"How much?"

"Double."

"Double? Why, then, I'd say you should think it over."

"But they've made the line a bit longer now. No, I don't know what's best to do — there's not so much timber to sell here as you've got on yours, and I've need to buy more things for the work that I've got now. And buying things needs money in cash, and I've not so much out of the land and stock that there's much over to sell. Seems to me I'll

have to try a year at the telegraph to begin with. . . ."

It did not occur to either of them that Brede might " do better " and keep the post himself.

When they reached Maaneland, Oline was there already, on her way down. Ay, a strange creature, Oline, crawling about fat and round as a maggot, and over seventy years and all, but still getting about. She sits drinking coffee in the hut, but seeing the men come up, all must give way to that, and she comes out.

" *Goddag,* Axel, and welcome back from the sale. You'll not mind me looking in to see how you and Barbro's getting on? And you're getting on finely, to see, and building a new house and getting richer and richer! And you been buying sheep, Isak? "

" Ay," said Isak. " You know her, maybe? "

" If I know her? Nay . . ."

" With these flat ears, you can see."

" Flat ears? How d'you mean now? And what then? What I was going to say: Who bought Brede's place, after all? I was just saying to Barbro here, who'd be your neighbours that way now? said I. And Barbro, poor thing, she sits crying, as natural enough, to be sure; but the Almighty that's decreed her a new home here at Maaneland . . . Flat ears? I've seen a deal of sheep in my day with flat ears and all. And I'll tell you, Isak, that machine of yours, 'twas almost more than my old eyes could see nor understand. And what she'll have cost you I won't even ask, for I never could

count so far. Axel, if you've seen it, you know what I mean; 'twas all as it might be Elijah and his chariot of fire, and Heaven forgive me that I say it. . . ."

When the hay was all in, Eleseus began making preparations for his return to town. He had written to the engineer to say he was coming, but received the extraordinary reply that times were bad, and they would have to economize; the office would have to dispense with Eleseus' services, and the chief would do the work himself.

The deuce and all! But after all, what did a district surveyor want with an office staff? When he had taken Eleseus on as a youngster, he had done so, no doubt, only to show himself as a great man to these folks in the wilds; and if he had given him clothes and board till his confirmation, he had got some return for it in the way of writing work, that was true. Now the boy was grown up, and that made all the difference.

"But," said the engineer, "if you do come back I will do all I can to get you a place somewhere else, though it may be a difficult matter, as there are more young men than are wanted looking out for the same thing. With kind regards. . . ."

Eleseus would go back to town, of course, there could be no question about that. Was he to throw himself away? He wanted to get on in the world. And he said nothing to those at home as to the altered state of affairs; it would be no use, and, to

tell the truth, he felt a little out of humour with the whole thing.

Anyhow, he said nothing. The life at Sellanraa was having its effect on him again; it was an inglorious, commonplace life, but quiet and dulling to the sense, a dreamy life; there was nothing for him to show off about, a looking-glass was a thing he had no use for. His town life had wrought a schism in himself, and made him finer than the others, made him weaker; he began indeed to feel that he must be homeless anywhere. He had come to like the smell of tansy again — let that pass. But there was no sense at all in a peasant lad's standing listening in the morning to the girls milking the cows and thinking thus: they're milking, listen now; 'tis almost by way of something wonderful to hear, a kind of song in nothing but little streams, different from the brass bands in the town and the Salvation Army and the steamer sirens. Music streaming into a pail. . . .

It was not the way at Sellanraa to show one's feelings over-much, and Eleseus dreaded the moment when he would have to say good-bye. He was well equipped now; again his mother had given him a stock of woven stuff for underclothes, and his father had commissioned some one to hand him money as he went out of the door. Money — could Isak really spare such a thing as money? But it was so, and no otherwise. Inger hinted that it would doubtless be the last time; for was not Eleseus going to get on and rise in the world by himself?

"H'm," said Isak.

There was an atmosphere of solemnity, of stillness in the home; they had each had a boiled egg at the last meal, and Sivert stood outside all ready to go down with his brother and carry his things. It was for Eleseus to begin.

He began with Leopoldine. Well and good, she said good-bye in return, and managed it very well. Likewise Jensine the servant-maid, she sat carding wool and answered good-bye — but both girls stared at him, confound them! and all because he might perhaps be the least bit red about the eyes. He shook hands with his mother, and she cried of course quite openly, never caring to remember how he hated crying. "Goo — ood-bye and bl — bless you!" she sobbed out. It was worst with his father; worst of all with him. Oh, in every way; he was so toil-worn and so utterly faithful; he had carried the children in his arms, had told them of the seagulls and other birds and beasts, and the wonders of the field; it was not so long ago, a few years. . . . Father stands by the glass window, then suddenly he turns round, grasps his son's hand, and says quickly and peevishly: "Well, good-bye. There's the new horse getting loose," and he swings out of the door and hurries away. Oh, but he had himself taken care to let the new horse loose a while ago, and Sivert, the rascal, knew it too, as he stood outside watching his father, and smiling to himself. And, anyway, the horse was only in the rowens.

Eleseus had got it over at last.

And then his mother must needs come out on the door-slab and hiccup again and say, "God bless you!" and give him something. "Take this — and you're not to thank him, he says you're not to. And don't forget to write; write often."

Two hundred *Kroner*.

Eleseus looked down the field: his father was furiously at work driving a tethering-peg into the ground; he seemed to find it a difficult matter, for all that the ground was soft enough.

The brothers set off down the road; they came to Maaneland, and there stood Barbro in the doorway and called to them to come up.

"You going away again, Eleseus? Nay, then, you must come in and take a cup of coffee at least."

They go into the hut, and Eleseus is no longer a prey to the pangs of love, nor wishful to jump out of windows and take poison; nay, he spreads his light spring overcoat across his knees, taking care to lay it so the silver plate is to be seen; then he wipes his hair with his handkerchief, and observes delicately: "Beautiful day, isn't it — simply classic!"

Barbro too is self-possessed enough; she plays with a silver ring on one hand and a gold ring on the other — ay, true enough, if she hasn't got a gold ring too — and she wears an apron reaching from neck to feet, as if to say she is not spoiled as to her figure, whoever else may be that way. And when the coffee is ready and her guests are drinking, she

sews a little to begin with on a white cloth, and then does a little crochet-work with a collar of some sort, and so with all manner of maidenly tasks. Barbro is not put out by their visit, and all the better; they can talk naturally, and Eleseus can be all on the surface again, young and witty as he pleases.

"What have you done with Axel?" asks Sivert.

"Oh, he's about the place somewhere," she answers, pulling herself up. "And so we'll not be seeing you this way any more, I doubt?" she asks Eleseus.

"It's hardly probable," says he.

"Ay, 'tis no place for one as is used to the town. I only wish I could go along with you."

"You don't mean that, I know."

"Don't mean it? Oh, I've known what it is to live in town, and what it's like here; and I've been in a bigger town than you, for that matter — and shouldn't I miss it?"

"I didn't mean that way," says Eleseus hastily. "After you being in Bergen itself and all." Strange, how impatient she was, after all!

"I only know that if it wasn't for having the papers to read, I'd not stay here another day," says she.

"But what about Axel, then, and all the rest? — 'twas that I was thinking."

"As for Axel, 'tis no business of mine. And what about yourself — I doubt there'll be some one waiting for you in town?"

And at that, Eleseus couldn't help showing off a

little and closing his eyes and turning over the morsel on his tongue: perhaps true enough there was some one waiting for him in town. Oh, but he could have managed this ever so differently, snapped at the chance, if it hadn't been for Sivert sitting there! As it was, he could only say: "Don't talk such nonsense!"

"Ho," said she — and indeed she was shamefully ill-humoured today —"nonsense, indeed! Well, what can you expect of folk at Maaneland? we're not so great and fine as you — no."

Oh, she could go to the devil, what did Eleseus care; her face was visibly dirty, and her condition plain enough now even to his innocent eyes.

"Can't you play a bit on the guitar?" he asked.

"No," answered Barbro shortly. "What I was going to say: Sivert, couldn't you come and help Axel a bit with the new house a day or so? If you could begin tomorrow, say, when you come back from the village?"

Sivert thought for a moment. "Ay, maybe. But I've no clothes."

"I could run up and fetch your working clothes this evening, so they'll be here when you get back."

"Ay," said Sivert, "if you could."

And Barbro unnecessarily eager now: "Oh, if only you would come! Here's summer nearly gone already, and the house that should be up and roofed before the autumn rains. Axel, he's been going to ask you a many times before, but he couldn't, somehow. Oh, you'd be helping us no end!"

"I'll help as well as I can," said Sivert.

And that was settled.

But now it was Eleseus' turn to be offended. He can see well enough that it's clever of Barbro and all that, to look out and manage to her own advantage and Axel's too, and get help for the building and save the house, but the whole thing is a little too plain; after all, she is not mistress of the place as yet, and it's not so long since he himself had kissed her — the creature! Was there never an atom of shame in her at all?

"Ay," said Eleseus, then suddenly: "I'll come back again in time and be a godfather when you're ready."

She sent him a glance, and answered in great offence: "Godfather, indeed! And who's talking nonsense now, I'd like to know? 'Twill be time enough for you when I send word I'm looking out for godfathers." And what could Eleseus do then but laugh foolishly and wish himself out of the place!

"Here's thanks!" says Sivert, and gets up from his seat to go.

"Here's thanks!" says Eleseus also; but he did not rise nor bow as a man should do in saying thanks for a cup of coffee; not he, indeed — he would see her at the devil for a bitter-tongued lump of ugliness.

"Let me look," said Barbro. "Oh yes; the young men I stayed with in town, they had silver plates on their overcoats too, much bigger than this," said she. "Well, then, you'll come in on your way

back, Sivert, and stay the night? I'll get your clothes all right."

And that was good-bye to Barbro.

The brothers went on again. Eleseus was not distressed in any way in the matter of Barbro; she could go to the devil — and, besides, he had two big bank-notes in his pocket! The brothers took care not to touch on any mournful things, such as the strange way father had said good-bye, or how mother had cried. They went a long way round to avoid being stopped at Breidablik, and made a jest of that little ruse. But when they came down in sight of the village, and it was time for Sivert to turn homeward again, they both behaved in somewhat unmanly fashion. Sivert, for instance, was weak enough to say: " I doubt it'll be a bit lonely, maybe, when you're gone."

And at that Eleseus must fall to whistling, and looking to his shoes, and finding a splinter in his finger, and searching after something in his pockets; some papers, he said, couldn't make out . . . Oh, 'twould have gone ill with them if Sivert had not saved things at the last. " Touch! " he cried suddenly, and touched his brother on the shoulder and sprang away. It was better after that; they shouted a word of farewell or so from a distance, and went each on his own way.

Fate or chance — whatever it might be. Eleseus went back, after all, to the town, to a post that was no longer open for him, but that same occasion led to Axel Ström's getting a man to work for him.

They began work on the house the 21st of August, and ten days later the place was roofed in. Oh, 'twas no great house to see, and nothing much in the way of height; the best that could be said of it was that it was a wooden house and no turf hut. But, at least, it meant that the animals would have a splendid shelter for the winter in what had been a house for human beings up to then.

Chapter II

ON the 3rd of September Barbro was not to be found. 'Twas not that she was altogether lost, but she was not up at the house.

Axel was doing carpenter's work the best he could; he was trying hard to get a glass window and a door set in the new house, and it was taking all his time to do it. But being long past noon, and no word said about coming in to dinner, he went in himself into the hut. No one there. He got himself some food, and looked about while he was eating. All Barbro's clothes were hanging there; she must be out somewhere, that was all. He went back to his work on the new building, and kept at it for a while, then he looked in at the hut again — no, nobody there. She must be lying down somewhere. He sets out to find her.

"Barbro!" he calls. No. He looks all round the houses, goes across to some bushes on the edge of his land, searches about a long while, maybe an hour, calls out — no. He comes on her a long way off, lying on the ground, hidden by some bushes; the stream flows by at her feet, she is barefoot and bareheaded, and wet all up the back as well.

"You lying here?" says he. "Why didn't you answer?"

" I couldn't," she answers, and her voice so hoarse he can scarcely hear.

" What — you been in the water? "

" Yes. Slipped down — oh! "

" Is it hurting you now? "

" Ay — it's over now."

" Is it over? " says he.

" Yes. Help me to get home."

" Where's . . . ? "

" What? "

" Wasn't it — the child? "

" No. 'Twas dead."

" Was it dead? "

" Yes."

Axel is slow of mind, and slow to act. He stands there still. " Where is it, then? " he asks.

" You've no call to know," says she. " Help me back home. 'Twas dead. I can walk if you hold my arm a bit."

Axel carries her back home and sets her in a chair, the water dripping off her. " Was it dead? " he asks.

" I told you 'twas so," she answers.

" What have you done with it, then? "

" D'you want to smell it? D'you get anything to eat while I was away? "

" But what did you want down by the water? "

" By the water? I was looking for juniper twigs."

" Juniper twigs? What for? "

" For cleaning the buckets."

"There's none that way," says he.

"You get on with your work," says she hoarsely, and all impatient. "What was I doing by the water? I wanted twigs for a broom. Have you had anything to eat, d'you hear?"

"Eat?" says he. "How d'you feel now?"

"'Tis well enough."

"I doubt I'd better fetch the doctor up."

"You'd better try!" says she, getting up and looking about for dry clothes to put on. "As if you'd no better to do with your money!"

Axel goes back to his work, and 'tis but little he gets done, but makes a bit of noise with planing and hammering, so she can hear. At last he gets the window wedged in, and stops the frame all round with moss.

That evening Barbro seems not to care for her food, but goes about, all the same, busy with this and that — goes to the cowshed at milking-time, only stepping a thought more carefully over the door-sill. She went to bed in the hayshed as usual. Axel went in twice to look at her, and she was sleeping soundly. She had a good night.

Next morning she was almost as usual, only so hoarse she could hardly speak at all, and with a long stocking wound round her throat. They could not talk together. Days passed, and the matter was no longer new; other things cropped up, and it slipped aside. The new house ought by rights to have been left a while for the timber to work together and make it tight and sound, but there was

no time for that now; they had to get it into use at once, and the new cowshed ready. When it was done, and they had moved in, they took up the potatoes, and after that there was the corn to get in. Life was the same as ever.

But there were signs enough, great or small, that things were different now at Maaneland. Barbro felt herself no more at home there now than any other serving-maid; no more bound to the place. Axel could see that his hold on her had loosened with the death of the child. He had thought to himself so confidently: wait till the child comes! But the child had come and gone. And at last Barbro even took off the rings from her fingers, and wore neither.

"What's that mean?" he asked.

"What's it mean?" she said, tossing her head.

But it could hardly mean anything else than faithlessness and desertion on her part.

And he had found the little body by the stream. Not that he had made any search for it, to speak of; he knew pretty closely where it must be, but he had left the matter idly as it was. Then chance willed it so that he should not forget it altogether; birds began to hover above the spot, shrieking grouse and crows, and then, later on, a pair of eagles at a giddy height above. To begin with, only a single bird had seen something buried there, and, being unable to keep a secret like a human being, had shouted it abroad. Then Axel roused himself from his apathy, and waited for an opportunity to steal out

to the spot. He found the thing under a heap of moss and twigs, kept down by flat stones, and wrapped in a cloth, in a piece of rag. With a feeling of curiosity and horror he drew the cloth a little aside — eyes closed, dark hair, a boy, and the legs crossed — that was all he saw. The cloth had been wet, but was drying now; the whole thing looked like a half-wrung bundle of washing.

He could not leave it there in the light of day, and in his heart, perhaps, he feared some ill to himself or to the place. He ran home for a spade and dug the grave deeper; but, being so near the stream, the water came in, and he had to shift it farther up the bank. As he worked, his fear lest Barbro should come and find him disappeared; he grew defiant and thoroughly bitter. Let her come, and he would make her wrap up the body neatly and decently after her, stillborn or no! He saw well enough all he had lost by the death of the child; how he was faced now with the prospect of being left without help again on the place — and that, moreover, with three times the stock to care for he had had at first. Let her come — he did not care! But Barbro — it might be she had some inkling of what he was at; anyway, she did not come, and Axel had to wrap up the body himself as best he could and move it to the new grave. He laid down the turf again on top, just as before, hiding it all. When he had done, there was nothing to be seen but a little green mound among the bushes.

He found Barbro outside the house as he came home.

"Where you been?" she asked.

The bitterness must have left him, for he only said: "Nowhere. Where've you been?"

Oh, but the look on his face must have warned her; she said no more, but went into the house.

He followed her.

"Look here," he said, and asked her straight out, "What d'you mean by taking off those rings?"

Barbro, maybe, found it best to give way a little; she laughed, and answered: "Well, you are serious today — I can't help laughing! But if you want me to put on the rings and wear them out weekdays, why, I will!" And she got out the rings and put them on.

But seeing him look all foolish and content at that, she grew bolder. "Is there anything else I've done, I'd like to know?"

"I'm not complaining," answered he. "And you've only to be as you were before, all the time before, when you first came. That's all I mean."

'Tis not so easy to be always together and always agree.

Axel went on: "When I bought that place after your father, 'twas thinking maybe you'd like better to be there, and so we could shift. What d'you think?"

Ho, there he gave himself away; he was afraid of losing her and being left without help, with none to look to the place and the animals again — she

knew! "Ay, you've said that before," she answered coldly.

"Ay, so I have; but I've got no answer."

"Answer?" said she. "Oh, I'm sick of hearing it."

Axel might fairly consider he had been lenient; he had let Brede and his family stay on at Breidablik, and for all that he had bought the good crop with the place, he had carted home no more than a few loads of hay, and left the potatoes to them. It was all unreasonable of Barbro to be contrary now; but she paid no heed to that, and asked indignantly: "So you'd have us move down to Breidablik now, and turn out a whole family to be homeless?"

Had he heard aright? He sat for a moment staring and gaping, cleared his throat as if to answer thoroughly, but it came to nothing; he only asked: "Aren't they going to the village, then?"

"Don't ask me," said Barbro. "Or perhaps you've got a place for them to be there?"

Axel was still loth to quarrel with her, but he could not help letting her see he was surprised at her, just a little surprised. "You're getting more and more cross and hard," said he, "though you don't mean any harm, belike."

"I mean every word I say," she answered. "And why couldn't you have let my folks come up here? — answer me that! Then I'd have had mother to help me a bit. But you think, perhaps, I've so little to do, I've no need of help?"

There was some sense in this, of course, but also

much that was unreasonable altogether. If Bredes had come, they would have had to live in the hut, and Axel would have had no place for his beasts — as badly off as before. What was the woman getting at? — had she neither sense nor wit in her head?

"Look here," said he, "you'd better have a servant-girl to help."

"Now — with the winter coming on and less to do than ever? No, you should have thought of that when I needed it."

Here, again, she was right in a way; when she had been heavy and ailing — that was the time to talk of help. But then Barbro herself had done her work all the time as if nothing were the matter; she had been quick and clever as usual, did all that had to be done, and had never spoken a word about getting help.

"Well, I can't make it out, anyway," said he hopelessly.

Silence.

Barbro asked: "What's this about you taking over the telegraph after father?"

"What? Who said a word about that?"

"Well, they say it's to be."

"Why," said Axel, "it may come to something; I'll not say no."

"Ho!"

"But why d'you ask?"

"Nothing," said Barbro; "only that you've

turned my father out of house and home, and now you're taking the bread out of his mouth."

Silence.

Oh, but that was the end of Axel's patience. "I'll tell you this," he cried, "you're not worth all I've done for you and yours!"

"Ho!" said Barbro.

"No!" said he, striking his fist on the table. And then he got up.

"You can't frighten me, so don't think," whimpered Barbro, and moved over nearer the wall.

"Frighten you?" he said again, and sniffed scornfully. "I'm going to speak out now in earnest. What about that child? Did you drown it?"

"Drown it?"

"Ay. It's been in the water."

"Ho, so you've seen it? You've been ——" "sniffing at it," she was going to say, but dared not; Axel was not to be played with just then, by his looks. "You've been and found it?"

"I saw it had been in the water."

"Ay," said she, "and well it might. 'Twas born in the water; I slipped in and couldn't get up again."

"Slipped, did you?"

"Yes, and the child came before I could get out."

"H'm," said he. "But you took the bit of wrapping with you before you went out — was that in case you should happen to fall in?"

"Wrapping?" said she again.

"A bit of white rag — one of my shirts you'd cut half across."

"Ay," said Barbro, "'twas a bit of rag I took with me to carry back juniper twigs in."

"Juniper twigs?"

"Yes. Didn't I tell you that was what I'd been for?"

"Ay, so you said. Or else it was twigs for a broom."

"Well, no matter what it was. . . ."

It was an open quarrel between them this time. But even that died away after a time, and all was well again. That is to say, not well exactly — no, but passable. Barbro was careful and more submissive; she knew there was danger. But that way, life at Maaneland grew even more forced and intolerable — no frankness, no joy between them, always on guard. It could not last long, but as long as it lasted at all, Axel was forced to be content. He had got this girl on the place, and had wanted her for himself and had her, tied his life to her; it was not an easy matter to alter all that. Barbro knew everything about the place: where pots and vessels stood, when cows and goats were to bear, if the winter feed would be short or plenty, how much milk was for cheese and how much for food — a stranger would know nothing of it all, and even so, a stranger was perhaps not to be had.

Oh, but Axel had thought many a time of getting rid of Barbro and taking another girl to help; she was a wicked thing at times, and he was almost afraid of her. Even when he had the misfortune

to get on well with her he drew back at times in fear of her strange cruelty and brutal ways; but she was pretty to look at, and could be sweet at times, and bury him deep in her arms. So it had been — but that was over now. No, thank you — Barbro was not going to have all that miserable business over again. But it was not so easy to change. . . . "Let's get married at once, then," said Axel, urging her.

"At once?" said she. "Nay; I must go into town first about my teeth, they're all but gone as it is."

So there was nothing to do but go on as before. And Barbro had no real wages now, but far beyond what her wages would have been; and every time she asked for money and he gave it, she thanked him as for a gift. But for all that Axel could not make out where the money went — what could she want money for out in the wilds? Was she hoarding for herself? But what on earth was there to save and save for, all the year round?

There was much that Axel could not make out. Hadn't he given her a ring — ay, a real gold ring? And they had got on well together, too, after that last gift; but it could not last for ever, far from it; and he could not go on buying rings to give her. In a word — did she mean to throw him over? Women were strange creatures! Was there a man with a good farm and a well-stocked place of his own waiting for her somewhere else? Axel could

at times go so far as to strike his fist on the table in his impatience with women and their foolish humours.

A strange thing, Barbro seemed to have nothing really in her head but the thought of Bergen and town life. Well and good. But if so, why had she come back at all, confound her! A telegram from her father would never have moved her a step in itself; she must have had some other reason. And now here she was, eternally discontented from morning to night, year after year. All these wooden buckets, instead of proper iron pails; cooking-pots instead of saucepans; the everlasting milking instead of a little walk round to the dairy; heavy boots, yellow soap, a pillow stuffed with hay; no military bands, no people. Living like this. . . .

They had many little bouts after the one big quarrel. Ho, time and again they were at it! "You say no more about it, if you're wise," said Barbro. "And not to speak of what you've done about father and all."

Said Axel: "Well, what have I done?"

"Oh, you know well enough," said she. "But for all that you'll not be Inspector, anyway."

"Ho!"

"No, that you won't. I'll believe it when I see it."

"Meaning I'm not good enough, perhaps?"

"Oh, good enough and good enough. . . . Anyway, you can't read nor write, and never so much as take a newspaper to look at."

"As to that," said he, "I can read and write all I've any need for. But as for you, with all your gabble and talk . . . I'm sick of it."

"Well, then, here's that to begin with," said she, and threw down the silver ring on the table.

"Ho!" said he, after a while. "And what about the other?"

"Oh, if you want your rings back that you gave me, you can have them," said she, trying to pull off the gold one.

"You can be as nasty as you please," said he. "If you think I care . . ." And he went out.

And naturally enough, soon after, Barbro was wearing both her rings again.

In time, too, she ceased to care at all for what he said about the death of the child. She simply sniffed and tossed her head. Not that she ever confessed anything, but only said: "Well, and suppose I had drowned it? You live here in the wilds and what do you know of things elsewhere?" Once when they were talking of this, she seemed to be trying to get him to see he was taking it all too seriously; she herself thought no more of getting rid of a child than the matter was worth. She knew two girls in Bergen who had done it; but one of them had got two months' imprisonment because she had been a fool and hadn't killed it, but only left it out to freeze to death; and the other had been acquitted. "No," said Barbro, "the law's not so cruel hard now as it used to be. And besides, it's not always it gets found out." There was a girl in

Bergen at the hotel who had killed two children; she was from Christiania, and wore a hat — a hat with feathers in. They had given her three months for the second one, but the first was never discovered, said Barbro.

Axel listened to all this and grew more than ever afraid of her. He tried to understand, to make out things a little in the darkness, but she was right after all; he took these things too seriously in his way. With all her vulgar depravity, Barbro was not worth a single earnest thought. Infanticide meant nothing to her, there was nothing extraordinary in the killing of a child; she thought of it only with the looseness and moral nastiness that was to be expected of a servant-girl. It was plain, too, in the days that followed; never an hour did she give herself up to thought; she was easy and natural as ever, unalterably shallow and foolish, unalterably a servant-girl. "I must go and have my teeth seen to," she said. "And I want one of those new cloaks." There was a new kind of half-length coat that had been fashionable for some years past, and Barbro must have one.

And when she took it all so naturally, what could Axel do but give way? And it was not always that he had any real suspicion of her; she herself had never confessed, had indeed denied time and again, but without indignation, without insistence, as a trifle, as a servant-girl would have denied having broken a dish, whether she had done so or not. But after a couple of weeks, Axel could stand it no

longer; he stopped dead one day in the middle of the room and saw it all as by a revelation. Great Heaven! every one must have seen how it was with her, heavy with child and plain to see — and now with her figure as before — but where was the child? Suppose others came to look for it? They would be asking about it sooner or later. And if there had been nothing wrong, it would have been far better to have had the child buried decently in the churchyard. Not there in the bushes, there on his land. . . .

"No. 'Twould only have made a fuss," said Barbro. "They'd have cut it open and had an inquest, and all that. I didn't want to be bothered."

"If only it mayn't come to worse later on," said he.

Barbro asked easily: "What's there to worry about? Let it lie where it is." Ay, she smiled, and asked: "Are you afraid it'll come after you? Leave all that nonsense, and say no more about it."

"Ay, well . . ."

"Did I drown the child? I've told you it drowned itself in the water when I slipped in. I never heard such things as you get in your head. And, anyway, it would never be found out," said she.

"'Twas found out all the same with Inger at Sellanraa," said Axel.

Barbro thought for a moment. "Well, I don't care," said she. "The law's all different now, and if you read the papers you'd know. There's heaps that have done it, and don't get anything to speak of." Barbro sets out to explain it, to teach him, as

it were — getting him to take a broad view of things. It was not for nothing she herself had been out in the world and seen and heard and learned so much; now she could sit here and be more than a match for him. She had three main arguments which she was continually advancing: In the first place, she had not done it. In the second, it was not such a terrible thing, after all, if she had done it. But in the third place, it would never be found out.

"Everything gets found out, seems to me," he objected.

"Not by a long way," she answered. And whether to astonish him or to encourage him, or perhaps from sheer vanity and as something to boast of, all of a sudden she threw a bombshell. Thus: "I've done something myself that never got found out."

"You?" said he, all unbelieving. "What have you done?"

"What have I done? Killed something."

She had not meant, perhaps, to go so far, but she had to go on now; there he was, staring at her. Oh, and it was not grand, indomitable boldness even; it was mere bravado, vulgar showing off; she wanted to look big herself, and silence him. "You don't believe me?" she cried. "D'you remember that in the paper about the body of a child found in the harbour? 'Twas me that did it."

"What?" said he.

"Body of a child. You never remember any-

thing. We read about it in the paper you brought up."

After a moment he burst out: "You must be out of your senses!"

But his confusion seemed to incite her more, to give her a sort of artificial strength; she could even give the details. "I had it in my box — it was dead then, of course — I did that as soon as it was born. And when we got out into the harbour, I threw it overboard."

Axel sat dark and silent, but she went on. It was a long time back now, many years, the time she had first come to Maaneland. So, there, he could see 'twas not everything was found out, not by a long way! What would things be like if everything folk did got out? What about all the married people in the towns and the things they did? They killed their children before they were born — there were doctors who managed that. They didn't want more than one, or at most two children, and so they'd get in a doctor to get rid of it before it come. Ho, Axel need not think that was such a great affair out in the world!

"Ho!" said Axel. "Then I suppose you did get rid of the last one too, that way?"

"No, I didn't," she answered carelessly as could be, "for I dropped it," she said. But even then she must go on again about it being nothing so terrible if she had. She was plainly accustomed to think of the thing as natural and easy; it did not affect her now. The first time, perhaps, it might

have been a little uncomfortable, something of an awkward feeling about it, to kill the child; but the second? She could think of it now with a sort of historic sense: as a thing that had been done, and could be done.

Axel went out of the house heavy in mind. He was not so much concerned over the fact that Barbro had killed her first child — that was nothing to do with himself. That she had had a child at all before she came to him was nothing much either; she was no innocent, and had never pretended to be so, far from it. She had made no secret of her knowledge, and had taught him many things in the dark. Well and good. But this last child — he would not willingly have lost it; a tiny boy, a little white creature wrapped up in a rag. If she were guilty of that child's death, then she had injured him, Axel — broken a tie that he prized, and that could not be replaced. But it might be that he wronged her, after all: that she *had* slipped in the water by accident. But then the wrapping — the bit of shirt she had taken with her . . .

Meantime, the hours passed; dinner-time came, and evening. And when Axel had gone to bed, and had lain staring into the dark long enough, he fell asleep at last, and slept till morning. And then came a new day, and after that day other days. . . .

Barbro was the same as ever. She knew so much of the world, and could take lightly many little trifles that were terrible and serious things for folk in the wilds. It was well in a way; she was clever

enough for both of them, careless enough for both. And she did not go about like a terrible creature herself. Barbro a monster? Not in the least. She was a pretty girl, with blue eyes, a slightly turned-up nose, and quick-handed at her work. She was utterly sick and tired of the farm and the wooden vessels, that took such a lot of cleaning; sick and tired, perhaps, of Axel and all, of the out-of-the-way life she led. But she never killed any of the cattle, and Axel never found her standing over him with uplifted knife in the middle of the night.

Only once it happened that they came to talk again of the body in the wood. Axel still insisted that it ought to have been buried in the churchyard, in consecrated ground; but she maintained as before that her way was good enough. And then she said something which showed that she was reasoned after her fashion — ho, was sharp enough, could see beyond the tip of her nose; could think, with the pitiful little brain of a savage.

" If it gets found out I'll go and talk to the Lensmand; I've been in service with him. And Fru Heyerdahl, she'll put in a word for me, I know. It's not every one that can get folk to help them like that, and they get off all the same. And then, besides, there's father, that knows all the great folks, and been assistant himself, and all the rest."

But Axel only shook his head.

" Well, what's wrong with that? "

" D'you think your father'd ever be able to do anything? "

"A lot you know about it!" she cried angrily. "After you've ruined him and all, taking his farm and the bread out of his mouth."

She seemed to have a sort of idea herself that her father's reputation had suffered of late, and that she might lose by it. And what could Axel say to that? Nothing. He was a man of peace, a worker.

Chapter III

THAT winter, Axel was left to himself again at Maaneland. Barbro was gone. Ay, that was the end of it.

Her journey to town would not take long, she said; 'twas not like going to Bergen; but she wasn't going to stay on here losing one tooth after another, till she'd a mouth like a calf. "What'll it cost?" said Axel.

"How do I know?" said she. "But, anyway, it won't cost you anything. I'll earn the money myself."

She had explained, too, why it was best for her to go just then; there were but two cows to milk, and in the spring there would be two more, besides all the goats with kids, and the busy season, and work enough right on till June.

"Do as you please," said Axel.

It was not going to cost him anything, not at all. But she must have some money to start with, just a little; there was the journey, and the dentist to pay, and besides, she must have one of the new cloaks and some other little things. But, of course, if he didn't care to . . .

"You've had money enough up to now," said he.

"H'm," said she. "Anyway, it's all gone."

"Haven't you put by anything?"

"Put by anything? You can look in my box if you like. I never put by anything in Bergen, and I got more wages then."

"I've no money to give you," said he.

He had but little faith in her ever coming back at all, and she had plagued him so much with her humours this way and that; he had grown indifferent at last. And though he gave her money in the end, it was nothing to speak of; but he took no notice when she packed away an enormous hoard of food to take with her, and he drove her down himself, with her box, to the village to meet the steamer.

And that was done.

He could have managed alone on the place, he had learned to do so before, but it was awkward with the cattle; if ever he had to leave home, there was none to look to them. The storekeeper in the village had urged him to get Oline to come for the winter, she had been at Sellanraa for years before; she was old now, of course, but fit and able to work. And Axel did send for Oline, but she had not come, and sent no word.

Meantime, he worked in the forest, threshed out his little crop of corn, and tended his cattle. It was a quiet and lonely life. Now and again Sivert from Sellanraa would drive past on his way to and from the village, taking down loads of wood, or hides, or farm produce, but rarely bringing anything up home; there was little they needed to buy now at Sellanraa.

Now and again, too, Brede Olsen would come

trudging along, more frequently of late — whatever he might be after. It looked as if he were trying to make himself indispensable to the telegraph people in the little time that remained, so as to keep his job. He never came in to see Axel now that Barbro was gone, but went straight by — a piece of high-and-mightiness ill fitted to his state, seeing that he was still living on at Breidablik and had not moved. One day, when he was passing without so much as a word of greeting, Axel stopped him, and asked when he had thought of getting out of the place.

"What about Barbro, and the way she left you?" asked Brede in return. And one word led to another: "You sent her off with neither help nor means, 'twas a near thing but she never got to Bergen at all."

"Ho! So she's in Bergen, is she?"

"Ay, got there at last, so she writes, but little thanks to you."

"I'll have you out of Breidablik, and that sharp," said Axel.

"Ay, if you'd be so kind," said the other, with a sneer. "But we'll be going of ourselves at the new year," he said, and went on his way.

So Barbro was gone to Bergen — ay, 'twas as Axel had thought. He did not take it to heart. Take it to heart? No, indeed; he was well rid of her. But for all that, he had hoped a little until then that she might come back. 'Twas all unreasonable, but somehow he had come to care overmuch

for the girl — ay, for that devil of a girl. She had her sweet moments, unforgettable moments, and it was on purpose to hinder her from running off to Bergen that he had given her so little money for the journey. And now she had gone there after all. A few of her clothes still hung in the house, and there was a straw hat with birds' wings on, wrapped up in a paper, in the loft, but she did not come to fetch them. Eyah, maybe he took it to heart a little, only a little. And as if to jeer at him, as a mighty jest in his trouble, came the paper he had ordered for her every week, and it would not stop now till the new year.

Well, well, there were other things to think about. He must be a man.

Next spring he would have to put up a shed against the north wall of the house; the timber would have to be felled that winter, and the planks cut. Axel had no timber to speak of, not growing close, but there were some heavy firs scattered about here and there on the outskirts of his land, and he marked out those on the side toward Sellanraa, to have the shortest way to cart his timber up to the sawmill.

And so one morning he gives the beasts an extra feed, to last them till the evening, shuts all doors behind him, and goes out felling trees. Besides his ax and a basket of food, he carried a rake to clear the snow away. The weather was mild, there had been a heavy snowstorm the day before, but now it had stopped. He follows the telegraph line all

the way to the spot, then pulls off his jacket and falls to work. As the trees are felled, he strips off the branches, leaving the clean trunks, and piles up the small wood in heaps.

Brede Olsen comes by on his way up — trouble on the line, no doubt, after yesterday's storm. Or maybe Brede was out on no particular errand, but simply from pure zeal — ho, he was mighty keen on his duty of late, was Brede! The two men did not speak, did not so much as lift a hand in greeting.

The weather is changing again, the wind is getting up. Axel marks it, but goes on with his work. It is long past noon, and he has not yet eaten. Then, felling a big fir, he manages to get in the way of its fall, and is thrown to the ground. He hardly knew how it happened — but there it was. A big fir swaying from the root: a man will have it fall one way, the storm says another — and the storm it is that wins. He might have got clear after all, but the lie of the ground was hidden by snow. Axel made a false step, lost his footing, and came down in a cleft of rock, astride of a boulder, pinned down by the weight of a tree.

Well, and what then? He might still have got clear, but, as it chanced, he had fallen awkwardly as could be — no bones broken, as far as he could tell, but twisted somehow, and unable to drag himself out. After a while he gets one hand free, supporting himself on the other, but the ax is beyond his reach. He looks round, takes thought, as any other beast in a trap would do; looks round and takes

thought and tries to work his way out from under the tree. Brede must be coming by on his way down before long, he thinks to himself, and gives himself a breathing-space.

He does not let it trouble him much at first, it was only annoying to lose time at his work; there is no thought in his mind of being in danger, let alone in peril of his life. True, he can feel the hand that supports him growing numbed and dead, his foot in the cleft growing cold and helpless too; but no matter, Brede must be here soon.

Brede did not come.

The storm increased, Axel felt the snow driving full in his face. Ho, 'tis coming down in earnest now, says he to himself, still never troubling much about it all — ay, 'tis as if he blinks at himself through the snow, to look out, for now things are beginning in earnest! After a long while he gives a single shout. The sound would hardly carry far in the gale, but it would be upward along the line, towards Brede. Axel lies there with all sorts of vain and useless thoughts in his head: if only he could reach the ax, and perhaps cut his way out! If he could only get his hand up — it was pressing against something sharp, an edge of stone, and the stone was eating its way quietly and politely into the back of his hand. Anyhow, if only that infernal stone itself had not been there — but no one has ever yet heard tell of such a touching act of kindness on the part of a stone.

Getting late now, getting later, the snow drifting

thick; Axel is getting snowed up himself. The snow packs all innocently, all unknowing, about his face, melting at first, till the flesh grows cold, and then it melts no longer. Ay, now 'tis beginning in earnest!

He gives two great shouts, and listens.

His ax is getting snowed up now; he can see but a bit of the haft. Over there is his basket of food, hung on a tree — if he could but have reached it, and had a feed — oh, huge big mouthfuls! And then he goes one step farther in his demands, and asks yet more: if he only had his coat on — it is getting cold. He gives another swinging shout. . . .

And there is Brede. Stopped in his tracks, standing still, looking toward the man as he calls; he stands there but for a moment, glancing that way, as if to see what is amiss.

"Reach me the ax here, will you?" calls Axel, a trifle weakly.

Brede looks away hurriedly, fully aware now of what is the matter; he glances up at the telegraph wires and seems to be whistling. What can he mean by that?

"Here, reach me the ax, can't you?" cries Axel louder. "I'm pinned here under a tree."

But Brede is strangely full of zeal in his duty now, he keeps on looking at the telegraph wires, and whistling all the time. Note, also, that he seems to be whistling gaily, as it were vengefully.

"Ho, so you're going to murder me — won't even reach me the ax?" cries Axel. And at that it seems as if there is trouble farther down the line,

which Brede must see to without delay. He moves off, and is lost to sight in the driving snow.

Ho — well and good! But after that, well, it would just serve things generally right if Axel were to manage by himself after all, and get at the ax without help from any one. He strains all the muscles of his chest to lift the huge weight that bears him down; the tree moves, he can feel it shake, but all he gains by that is a shower of snow. And after a few more tries, he gives up.

Growing dark now. Brede is gone — but how far can he have got? Axel shouts again, and lets off a few straight-forward words into the bargain. "Leave me here to die, would you, like a murderer?" he cries. "Have ye no soul nor thought of what's to come? And the worth of a cow, no less, to lend a helping hand. But 'tis a dog you are and ever were, Brede, and leaving a man to die. Ho, but there's more shall know of this, never fear, and true as I'm lying here. And won't even come and reach me that ax . . ."

Silence. Axel strains away at the tree once more, lifts it a little, and brings down a new shower of snow. Gives it up again and sighs; he is worn out now, and getting sleepy. There's the cattle at home, they'll be standing in the hut and bellowing for food, not a bite nor a drop since the morning; no Barbro to look to them now — no. Barbro's gone, run off and gone, and taken both her rings, gold and silver, taken them with her. Getting dark now, ay, evening, night; well, well . . . But there's the cold to

reckon with too; his beard is freezing, soon his eyes will freeze too as well; ay, if he had but his jacket from the tree there . . . and now his leg — surely, it can't be that — but all the same one leg feels dead now up to the hip. "All in God's hands," he says to himself — seems like he can talk all godly and pious when he will. Getting dark, ay; but a man can die without the light of a lamp. He feels all soft and good now, and of sheer humility he smiles, foolishly and kindly, at the snowstorm round; 'tis God's own snow, an innocent thing! Ay, he might even forgive Brede, and never say a word. . . .

He is very quiet now, and growing ever more sleepy, ay, as if some poison were numbing him all over. And there is too much whiteness to look at every way; woods and lands, great wings, white veils, white sails; white, white . . . what can it be? Nonsense, man! And he knows well enough it is but snow; he is lying out in the snow; 'tis no fancy that he is lying there, pinned down beneath a tree.

He shouts again at hazard, throws out a roar; there in the snow a man's great hairy chest swelling to a roar, bellowing so it could be heard right down at the hut, again and again. "Ay, and a swine and a monster," he cries after Brede again; "never a thought of how you're leaving me to lie and be perished. And couldn't even reach me the ax, that was all I asked; and call yourself a man, or a beast of the field? Ay, well then, go your way, and good luck to you if that's your will and thought to go. . ."

He must have slept; he is all stiff and lifeless now, but his eyes are open; set in ice, but open, he cannot wing nor blink — has he been sleeping with open eyes? Dropped off for a second maybe, or for an hour, God knows, but here's Oline standing before him. He can hear her asking: "In Jesu name, say if there's life in you!" And asking him if it is him lying there, and if he's lost his wits or no.

Always something of a jackal about Oline; sniffing and scenting out, always on the spot where there was trouble; ay, she would nose it out. And how could she ever have managed through life at all if it hadn't been that same way? Axel's word had reached her, and for all her seventy years she had crossed the fjeld to come. Snowed up at Sellanraa in the storm of the day before, and then on again to Maaneland; not a soul on the place; fed the cattle, stood in the doorway listening, milked the cows at milking-time, listening again; what could it be? . . .

And then a cry comes down, and she nods; Axel, maybe, or maybe the hill-folk, devils — anyway, something to sniff and scent and find — to worm out the meaning of it all, the wisdom of the Almighty with the dark and the forest in the hollow of His hand — and He would never harm Oline, that was not worthy to unloose the latchet of His shoes. . . .

And there she stands.

The ax? Oline digs down and down in the snow, and finds no ax. Manage without, then — and she strains at the tree to lift it where it lies, but with no more strength than a child; she can but

shake the branches here and there. Tries for the ax again — it is all dark, but she digs with hands and feet. Axel cannot move a hand to point, only tell where it lay before, but 'tis not there now. "If it hadn't been so far to Sellanraa," says Axel.

Then Oline falls to searching her own ways, and Axel calls to her that there's no ax there. "Ay, well," says Oline, "I was but looking a bit. And what's this, maybe?" says she.

"You've found it?" says he.

"Ay, by the grace of the Lord Almighty," answers Oline, with high-sounding words.

But there's little pride in Axel now, no more than he'll give in that he was wrong after all, and maybe not all clear in his head. And what's he to do with the ax now 'tis there? He cannot stir, and Oline has to cut him free herself. Oh, Oline has wielded an ax before that day; had axed off many a load of firing in her life.

Axel cannot walk, one leg is dead to the hip, and something wrong with his back; shooting pains that make him groan curiously — ay, he feels but a part of himself, as if something were left behind there under the tree. "Don't know," says he —"don't know what it can be. . . ." But Oline knows, and tells him now with solemn words; ay, for she has saved a human creature from death, and she knows it; 'tis the Almighty has seen fit to lay on her this charge, where He might have sent legions of angels. Let Axel consider the grace and infinite wisdom of the Almighty even in this! And if so be as it had

been His pleasure to send a worm out of the earth instead, all things were possible to Him.

"Ay, I know," said Axel. "But I can't make out how 'tis with me — feels strange. . . ."

Feels strange, does it? Oh, but only wait, wait just a little. 'Twas but to move and stretch the least bit at a time, till the life came back. And get his jacket on and get warm again. But never in all her days would she forget how the Angel of the Lord had called her out to the doorway that last time, that she might hear a voice — the voice of one crying in the forest. Ay, 'twas as in the days of Paradise, when trumpets blew and compassed round the walls of Jericho. . . .

Ay, strange. But while she talked, Axel was taking his time, learning the use of his limbs again, getting to walk.

They get along slowly towards home, Oline still playing saviour and supporting him. They manage somehow. A little farther down they come upon Brede. "What's here?" says Brede. "Hurt yourself? Let me help a bit."

Axel takes no heed. He had given a promise to God not to be vengeful, not to tell of what Brede had done, but beyond that he was free. And what was Brede going up that way again for now? Had he seen that Oline was at Maaneland, and guessed that she would hear?

"And it's you here, Oline, is it?" goes on Brede easily. "Where d'you find him? Under a tree? Well, now, 'tis a curious thing," says he. "I was

up that way just now on duty, along the line, and seems like I heard some one shouting. Turns round and listens quick as a flash — Brede's the man to lend a hand if there's need. And so 'twas Axel, was it, lying under a tree, d'you say?"

"Ay," says Axel. "And well you knew that saw and heard as well. But never helping hand . . ."

"Good Lord, deliver us!" cries Oline, aghast. "As I'm a sinner . . ."

Brede explains. "Saw? Why, yes, I saw you right enough. But why didn't you call out? You might have called out if there was anything wrong. I saw you right enough, ay, but never thought but you were lying down a bit to rest."

"You'd better say no more," says Axel warningly. "You know well enough you left me there and hoping I'd never rise again."

Oline sees her way now; Brede must not be allowed to interfere. She must be indispensable, nothing can come between her and Axel that could make him less completely indebted to herself. She had saved him, she alone. And she waves Brede aside; will not even let him carry the ax or the basket of food. Oh, for the moment she is all on Axel's side — but next time she comes to Brede and sits talking to him over a cup of coffee, she will be on his.

"Let me carry the ax and things, anyway," says Brede.

"Nay," says Oline, speaking for Axel. "He'll take them himself."

And Brede goes on again: "You might have

called to me, anyway; we're not so deadly enemies that you couldn't say a word to a man? — You did call? Well, you might have shouted then, so a man could hear. Blowing a gale and all. . . . Leastways, you might have waved a hand."

"I'd no hand to wave," answers Axel. "You saw how 'twas with me, shut down and locked in all ways."

"Nay, that I'll swear I didn't. Well, I never heard. Here, let me carry those things."

Oline puts in: "Leave him alone. He's hurt and poorly."

But Axel's mind is getting to work again now. He has heard of Oline before, and understands it will be a costly thing for him, and a plague besides, if she can claim to have saved his life all by herself. Better to share between them as far as may be. And he lets Brede take the basket and the tools; ay, he lets it be understood that this is a relief, that it eases him to get rid of it. But Oline will not have it, she snatches away the basket, she and no other will carry what's to be carried there. Sly simplicity at war on every side. Axel is left for a moment without support, and Brede has to drop the basket and hold him, though Axel can stand by himself now, it seems.

Then they go on a bit that way, Brede holding Axel's arm, and Oline carrying the things. Carrying, carrying, full of bitterness and flashing fire; a miserable part indeed, to carry a basket instead of

leading a helpless man. What did Brede want coming that way at all — devil of a man!

"Brede," says she, "what's it they're saying, you've sold your place and all?"

"And who's it wants to know?" says Brede boldly.

"Why, as to that, I'd never thought 'twas any secret not to be known."

"Why didn't you come to the sale, then, and bid with the rest?"

"Me — ay, 'tis like you to make a jest of poor folk."

"Well, and I thought 'twas you had grown rich and grand. Wasn't it you had left you old Sivert's chest and all his money in? He he he!"

Oline was not pleased, not softened at being minded of that legacy. "Ay, old Sivert, he'd a kindly thought for me, and I'll not say otherwise. But once he was dead and gone, 'twas little they left after him in worldly goods. And you know yourself how 'tis to be stripped of all, and live under other man's roof; but old Sivert he's in palaces and mansions now, and the likes of you and me are left on earth to be spurned underfoot."

"Ho, you and your talk!" says Brede scornfully, and turns to Axel: "Well, I'm glad I came in time — help you back home. Not going too fast, eh?"

"No."

Talk to Oline, stand up and argue with Oline! Was never a man could do it but to his cost. Never in life would she give in, and never her match for

turning and twisting heaven and earth to a medley of seeming kindness and malice, poison and senseless words. This to her face now: Brede making as if 'twas himself was bringing Axel home!

"What I was going to say," she begins: "They gentlemen came up to Sellanraa that time; did you ever get to show them all those sacks of stone you'd got, eh, Brede?"

"Axel," says Brede, "let me hoist you on my shoulders, and I'll carry you down rest of the way."

"Nay," says Axel. "For all it's good of you to ask."

So they go on; not far now to go. Oline must make the best of her time on the way. "Better if you'd saved him at the point of death," says she. "And how was it, Brede, you coming by and seeing him in deadly peril and heard his cry and never stopped to help?"

"You hold your tongue," says Brede.

And it might have been easier for her if she had, wading deep in snow and out of breath, and a heavy burden and all, but 'twas not Oline's way to hold her tongue. She'd a bit in reserve, a dainty morsel. Ho, 'twas a dangerous thing to talk of, but she dared it.

"There's Barbro now," says she. "And how's it with her? Not run off and away, perhaps?"

"Ay, she has," answers Brede carelessly. "And left a place for you for the winter by the same."

But here was a first-rate opening for Oline again; she could let it be seen now what a personage she

was; how none could manage long without Oline — Oline, that had to be sent for near or far. She might have been two places, ay, three, for that matter. There was the parsonage — they'd have been glad to have her there, too. And here was another thing — ay, let Axel hear it too, 'twould do no harm — they'd offered her so-and-so much for the winter, not to speak of a new pair of shoes and a sheepskin into the bargain. But she knew what she was doing, coming to Maaneland, coming to a man that was lordly to give and would pay her over and above what other folk did — and so she'd come. No, 'twas no need for Brede to trouble himself that gait — when her Heavenly Father had watched over her all those years, and opened this door and that before her feet, and bidden her in. Ay, and it seemed like God Himself had known what He was doing, sending her up to Maaneland that day, to save the life of one of His creatures on earth. . . .

Axel was getting wearied again by now; his legs could hardly bear him, and seemed like giving up. Strange, he had been getting better by degrees, able to walk, as the life and warmth came back into his body. But now — he must lean on Brede for support! It seemed to begin when Oline started talking about her wages; and then, when she was saving his life again, it was worse than ever. Was he trying to lessen her triumph once more? Heaven knows — but his mind seemed to be working again. As they neared the house, he stopped, and said: "Looks like I'll never get there, after all."

Brede hoists him up without a word, and carries him. So they go on like that, Oline all venom, Axel up full length on Brede's back.

"What I was going to say," gets out Oline — "about Barbro — wasn't she far gone with child?"

"Child?" groans Brede, under the weight. Oh, 'tis a strange procession; but Axel lets himself be carried all the way till he's set down at his own door.

Brede puffs and blows, mightily out of breath.

"Ay, or how — was it ever born, after all?" asks Oline.

Axel cuts in quickly with a word to Brede: "I don't know how I'd ever have got home this night but for you." And he does not forget Oline: "And you, Oline, that was the first to find me. I've to thank you both for it all."

That was how Axel was saved. . . .

The next few days Oline would talk of nothing but the great event; Axel was hard put to it to keep her within bounds. Oline can point out the very spot where she was standing in the room when an angel of the Lord called her out to the door to hear a cry for help — Axel goes back to his work in the woods, and when he has felled enough, begins carting it up to the sawmill at Sellanraa.

Good, regular winter work, as long as it lasts; carting up rough timber and bringing back sawn planks. The great thing is to hurry and get through with it before the new year, when the frost sets in in earnest, and the saw cannot work. Things are go-

ing on nicely, everything as well as could be wished. If Sivert happens to come up from the village with an empty sledge, he stops and takes a stick of timber on the way, to help his neighbour. And the pair of them talk over things together, and each is glad of a talk with the other.

"What's the news down village?" asks Axel.

"Why, nothing much," says Sivert. "There's a new man coming to take up land, so they say."

A new man — nothing in that; 'twas only Sivert's way of putting it. New men came now every year or so, to take up land; there were five new holdings now below Breidablik. Higher up, things went more slowly, for all that the soil was richer that way. The one who had ventured farthest was Isak, when he settled down at Sellanraa; he was the boldest and the wisest of them all. Later, Axel Ström had come — and now there was a new man besides. The new man was to have a big patch of arable land and forest down below Maaneland — there was land enough.

"Heard what sort of a man it is?" asked Axel.

"Nay," said Sivert. "But he's bringing up houses all ready made, to fix up in no time."

"Ho! A rich man, then?"

"Ay, seems like. And a wife and three children with him; and horse and cattle."

"Why, then, 'twill be a rich man enough. Any more about him?"

"No. He's three-and-thirty."

"And what's his name?"

"Aron, they say. Calls his place Storborg."

"Storborg? H'm. 'Tis no little place, then." [1]

"He's come up from the coast. Had a fishery there, so they say."

"H'm — fishery. Wonder if he knows much about farming?" says Axel. "That all you heard? Nothing more?"

"No. He paid all down in cash for the title-deeds. That's all I heard. Must have made a heap of money with his fishery, they say. And now he's going to start here with a store."

"Ho! A store?"

"Ay, so they say."

"H'm. So he's going to start a store?"

This was the one really important piece of news, and the two neighbours talked it over every way as they drove up. It was a big piece of news — the greatest event, perhaps, in all the history of the place; ay, there was much to say of that. Who was he going to trade with, this new man? The eight of them that had settled on the common lands? Or did he reckon on getting custom from the village as well? Anyway, the store would mean a lot to them; like as not, it would bring up more settlers again. The holdings might rise in value — who could say?

They talked it over as if they would never tire. Ay, here were two men with their own interests and aims, as great to them as other men's. The settlement was their world; work, seasons, crops were the

[1] "*Stor*" = great.

adventures of their life. Was not that interest and excitement enough? Ho, enough indeed! Many a time they had need to sleep but lightly, to work on long past meal-times; but they stood it, they endured it and were none the worse; a matter of seven hours lying pinned down beneath a tree was not a thing to spoil them for life as long as their limbs were whole. A narrow world, a life with no great prospects? Ho, indeed! What of this new Storborg, a shop and a store here in the wilds — was not that prospect enough?

They talked it over until Christmas came. . . .

Axel had got a letter, a big envelope with a lion on it; it was from the State. He was to fetch supplies of wire, a telegraph apparatus, tools and implements, from Brede Olsen, and take over inspection of the line from New Year's Day.

Chapter IV

TEAMS of horses driving up over the moors, carting up houses for the new man come to settle in the wilds; load after load, for days on end. Dump the things down on a spot that is to be called Storborg; 'twill answer to its name, no doubt, in time. There are four men already at work up in the hills, getting out stone for a wall and two cellars.

Carting loads, carting new loads. The sides of the house are built and ready beforehand, 'tis only to fix them up when the spring comes; all reckoned out neatly and accurately in advance, each piece with its number marked, not a door, not a window lacking, even to the coloured glass for the verandah. And one day a cart comes up with a whole load of small stakes. What's them for? One of the settlers from lower down can tell them; he's from the south, and has seen the life before. "'Tis for a garden fence," says he. So the new man is going to have a garden laid out in the wilds — a big garden.

All looked well; never before had there been such carting and traffic up over the moors, and there were many that earned good money letting out their horses for the work. This, again, was matter for

discussion. There was the prospect of making money in the future; the trader would be getting his goods from different parts; inland or overseas, they would have to be carted up from the sea with teams of horses.

Ay, it looked as if things were going to be on a grander scale all round. Here was a young foreman or manager in charge of the carting work; a lordly young spark he was, and grumbled at not getting horses enough, for all that there were not so many loads to come.

"But there can't be so much more to come now, with the houses all up," they said.

"Ho, and what about the goods?" he answered.

Sivert from Sellanraa came clattering up homeward, empty as usual, and the foreman called to him: "Hi, what are you coming up empty for? Why didn't you bring up a load for us here?"

"Why, I might have," said Sivert. "But I'd no knowledge of it."

"He's from Sellanraa; they've two horses there," some one whispered.

"What's that? You've got two horses?" says the foreman. "Bring them down, then, the pair of them, to help with the cartage here. We'll pay you well."

"Why," says Sivert, "that's none so bad, dare say. But we're pressed just now, and can't spare the time."

"What? Can't spare the time to make money!" says the foreman.

But they had not always time at Sellanraa, there was much to do on the place. They had hired men to help — the first time such a thing had ever been done at Sellanraa — two stoneworkers from the Swedish side, to get out stone for a new cowshed.

This had been Isak's great idea for years past, to build a proper cowshed. The turf hut where the cattle were housed at present was too small, and out of repair; he would have a stone-built shed with double walls and a proper dung-pit under. It was to be done now. But there were many other things to be done as well, one thing always leading to another; the building work, at any rate, seemed never to be finished. He had a sawmill and a cornmill and a summer shed for the cattle; it was but reasonable he should have a smithy. Only a little place, for odd jobs as need arose; it was a long way to send down to the village when the sledge-hammer curled at the edges or a horseshoe or so wanted looking to. Just enough to manage with, that was all — and why shouldn't he? Altogether, there were many outbuildings, little and big, at Sellanraa.

The place is growing, getting bigger and bigger, a mighty big place at last. Impossible now to manage without a girl to help, and Jensine has to stay on. Her father, the blacksmith, asks after her now and again, if she isn't coming home soon; but he does not make a point of it, being an easy-going man, and maybe with his own reasons for letting her stay. And there is Sellanraa, farthest out of all the settlements, growing bigger and bigger all the

time; the place, that is, the houses and the ground, only the folk are the same. The day is gone when wandering Lapps could come to the house and get all they wanted for the asking; they come but rarely now, seem rather to go a long way round and keep out of sight; none are even seen inside the house, but wait without if they come at all. Lapps always keep to the outlying spots, in dark places; light and air distress them, they cannot thrive; 'tis with them as with maggots and vermin. Now and again a calf or a lamb disappears without a trace from the outskirts of Sellanraa, from the farthest edge of the land — there is no helping that. And Sellanraa can bear the loss. And even if Sivert could shoot, he has no gun, but anyway, he cannot shoot; a good-tempered fellow, nothing warlike; a born jester: "And, anyway, I doubt but there's a law against shooting Lapps," says he.

Ay, Sellanraa can bear the loss of a head or so of cattle here and there; it stands there, great and strong. But not without its troubles for all that. Inger is not altogether pleased with herself and with life all the year round, no; once she made a journey to a place a long way off, and it seems to have left an ugly discontent behind. It may disappear for a time, but always it returns. She is clever and hard-working as in her best days, and a handsome, healthy wife for a man, for a barge of a man — but has she no memories of Trandhjem; does she never dream? Ay, and in winter most of all. Full of life and spirits at times, and wanting no end of things — but

a woman cannot dance by herself, and so there was no dancing at Sellanraa. Heavy thoughts and books of devotion? Ay, well. . . . But there's something, Heaven knows, in the other sort of life, something splendid and unequalled. She has learned to make do with little; the Swedish stoneworkers are something, at any rate; strange faces and new voices about the place, but they are quiet, elderly men, given to work rather than play. Still, better than nothing — and one of them sings beautifully at his work; Inger stops now and again to listen. Hjalmar is his name.

And that is not all the trouble at Sellanraa. There is Eleseus, for instance — a disappointment there. He had written to say that his place in the engineer's office was no longer open, but he was going to get another all right — only wait. Then came another letter; he was expecting something to turn up very shortly, a first-rate post; but meantime, he could not live on nothing at all, and when they sent him a hundred-*Krone* note from home, he wrote back to say it was just enough to pay off some small debts he had. . . . " H'm," said Isak. " But we've these stoneworker folk to pay, and a deal of things . . . write and ask if he wouldn't rather come back here and lend a hand."

And Inger wrote, but Eleseus did not care about coming home again; no, no sense in making another journey all to no purpose; he would rather starve.

Well, perhaps there was no first-rate post vacant just then in the city, and Eleseus, perhaps, was not

as sharp as a razor in pushing his way. Heaven knows — perhaps he wasn't over clever at his work either. Write? ay, he could write well enough, and quick and hard-working maybe, but there might be something lacking for all that. And if so, what was to become of him?

When he arrived from home with his two hundred *Kroner,* the city was waiting for him with old accounts outstanding, and when those were paid, well, he had to get a proper walking-stick, and not the remains of an umbrella. There were other little things as well that were but reasonable — a fur cap for the winter, like all his companions wore, a pair of skates to go on the ice with as others did, a silver toothpick, which was a thing to clean one's teeth, and play with daintily when chatting with friends over a glass of this or that. And as long as he had money, he stood treat as far as he was able; at a festive evening held to celebrate his return to town, he ordered half a dozen bottles of beer, and had them opened sparingly, one after another. "What — twenty *Ore* for the waitress?" said his friends; "ten's quite enough."

"Doesn't do to be stingy," said Eleseus.

Nothing stingy nor mean about Eleseus, no; he come from a good home, from a big place, where his father the Margrave owned endless tracts of timber, and four horses and thirty cows and three mowing-machines. Eleseus was no liar, and it was not he who had spread abroad all the fantastic stories about the Sellanraa estate; 'twas the district sur-

veyor who had amused himself talking grandly about it a long while back. But Eleseus was not displeased to find the stories taken more or less for truth. Being nothing in himself, it was just as well to be the son of somebody that counted for something; it gave him credit, and was useful that way. But it could not last for ever; the day came when he could no longer put off paying, and what was he to do then? One of his friends came to his help, got him into his father's business, a general store where the peasants bought their wares — better than nothing. It was a poor thing for a grown lad to start at a beginner's wage in a little shop; no short cut to the position of a Lensmand; still, it gave him enough to live on, helped him over the worst for the present — oh, 'twas not so bad, after all. Eleseus was willing and good-tempered here too, and people liked him; he wrote home to say he had gone into trade.

This was his mother's greatest disappointment. Eleseus serving in a shop —'twas not a whit better than being assistant at the store down in the village. Before, he had been something apart, something different from the rest; none of their neighbours had gone off to live in a town and work in an office. Had he lost sight of his great aim and end? Inger was no fool; she knew well enough that there was a difference between the ordinary and the uncommon, though perhaps she did not always think to reckon with it. Isak was simpler and slower of thought; he reckoned less and less with Eleseus now,

when he reckoned at all; his eldest son was gradually slipping out of range. Isak no longer thought of Sellanraa divided between his two sons when he himself should be gone.

Some way on in spring came engineers and workmen from Sweden; going to build roads, put up huts ments, work in various ways, blasting, levelling, getting up supplies of food, hiring teams of horses, making arrangements with owners of land by the waterside; what — what was it all about? This is in the wilds, where folk never came but those who lived there? Well, they were going to start that copper mine, that was all.

So it had come to something after all; Geissler had not been merely boasting.

It was not the same big men that had come with him that time — no, the two of them had stayed behind, having business elsewhere, no doubt. But the same engineer was there, and the mining expert that had come at first. They bought up all the sawn planks Isak could spare, bought food and drink and paid for it well, chatted in kindly fashion and were pleased with Sellanraa. "Aerial railway," they said. "Cable haulage from the top of the fjeld down to the waterside," they said.

"What, down over all this moorland here?" said Isak, being slow to think. But they laughed at that.

"No, on the other side, man; not this way, 'twould be miles to go. No, on the other side of the fjeld, straight down to the sea; a good fall, and no

distance to speak of. Run the ore down through the air in iron tanks; oh, it'll work all right, you wait and see. But we'll have to cart it down at first; make a road, and have it hauled down in carts. We shall want fifty horses — you see, we'll get on finely. And we've more men on the works than these few here — that's nothing. There's more coming up from the other side, gangs of men, with huts all ready to put up, and stores of provisions and material and tools and things — then we meet and make connection with them half-way, on the top, you see? We'll make the thing go, never fear — and ship the ore to South America. There's millions to be made out of it."

"What about the other gentlemen," asked Isak, "that came up here before?"

"What? Oh, they've sold out. So you remember them? No, they've sold. And the people that bought them out have sold again. It's a big company now that owns the mine — any amount of money behind it."

"And Geissler, where'll he be now?" asks Isak.

"Geissler? Never heard of him. Who's he?"

"Lensmand Geissler, that sold you the place first of all."

"Oh, him! Geissler was his name? Heaven knows where he is now. So you remember him too?"

Blasting and working up in the hills, gangs of men at work all through the summer — there was

plenty doing about the place. Inger did a busy trade in milk and farm produce, and it amused her — going into business, as it were, and seeing all the many folk coming and going. Isak tramped about with his lumbering tread, and worked on his land; nothing disturbed him. Sivert and the two stone-workers got the new cowshed up. It was a fine building, but took a deal of time before it was finished, with only three men to the work, and Sivert, moreover, often called away to help in the fields. The mowing-machine was useful now; and a good thing, too, to have three active women that could take a turn at the haymaking.

All going well; there was life in the wilds now, and money growing, blossoming everywhere.

And look at Storborg, the new trader's place — there was a business on a proper scale! This Aron must be a wizard, a devil of a fellow; he had learned somehow beforehand of the mining operations to come, and was on the spot all ready, with his shop and store, to make the most of it. Business? He did business enough for a whole State — ay, enough for a king! To begin with, he sold all kinds of household utensils and workmen's clothes; but miners earning good money are not afraid to spend it; not content with buying necessaries only; they would buy anything and everything. And most of all on Saturday evenings, the trading station at Storborg was crowded with folk, and Aron raking money in; his clerk and his wife were both called in to help behind the counter, and Aron himself serving and selling

as hard as he could go at it — and even then the place would not be empty till late at night. And the owners of horse-flesh in the village, they were right; 'twas a mighty carting and hauling of wares up to Storborg; more than once they had to cut off corners of the old road and make new short cuts — a fine new road it was at last, very different from Isak's first narrow path up through the wilds. Aron was a blessing and a benefactor, nothing less, with his store and his new road. His name was not Aron really, that being only his Christian name; properly, he was Aronsen, and so he called himself, and his wife called him the same. They were a family not to be looked down upon, and kept two servant-girls and a lad.

As for the land at Storborg, it remained untouched for the present. Aronsen had no time for working on the soil — where was the sense of digging up a barren moor? But Aronsen had a garden, with a fence all round, and currant bushes and asters and rowans and planted trees — ay, a real garden. There was a broad path down it, where Aronsen could walk o' Sundays and smoke his pipe, and in the background was the verandah of the house, with panes of coloured glass, orange and red and blue. Storborg . . . And there were children — three pretty little things about the place. The girl was to learn to play her part as daughter of a wealthy trader, and the boys were to learn the business themselves — ay, three children with a future before them!

Aronsen was a man to take thought for the future, or he would not have come there at all. He might have stuck to his fishery, and like enough been lucky at that and made good money, but 'twas not like going into business; nothing so fine, a thing for common folk at best. People didn't take off their hats to a fisherman. Aronsen had rowed his boat before, pulling at the oars; now he was going to sail instead. There was a word he was always using: "Cash down." He used it all sorts of ways. When things went well, they were going "cash down." His children were to get on in the world, and live more "cash down" even than himself. That was how he put it, meaning that they should have an easier life of it than he had had.

And look you, things did go well; neighbours took notice of him, and of his wife — ay, even of the children. It was not the least remarkable thing, that folk took notice of the children. The miners came down from their work in the hills, and had not seen a child's face for many days; when they caught sight of Aronsen's little ones playing in the yard, they would talk kindly to them at once, as if they had met three puppies at play. They would have given them money, but seeing they were the trader's children, it would hardly do. So they played music for them on their mouth-organs instead. Young Gustaf came down, the wildest of them all, with his hat over one ear, and his lips ever ready with a merry word; ay, Gustaf it was that came and played with them for long at a time. The children knew him every time,

and ran to meet them; he would pick them up and carry them on his back, all three of them, and dance with them. "Ho!" said Gustaf, and danced with them. And then he would take out his mouth-organ and play tunes and music for them, till the two servant-girls would come out and look at him, and listen, with tears in their eyes. Ay, a madcap was Gustaf, but he knew what he was doing!

Then after a bit he would go into the shop and throw his money about, buying up a whole knapsack full of things. And when he went back up the road again, it was with a whole little stock-in-trade of his own — and he would stop at Sellanraa on the way and open his pack and show them. Notepaper with a flower in the corner, and a new pipe and a new shirt, and a fringed neckerchief — sweets for the womenfolk, and shiny things, a watch-chain with a compass, a pocket-knife — oh, a host of things. Ay, there were rockets he had bought to let off on Sunday, for every one to see. Inger gave him milk, and he joked with Leopoldine, and picked up little Rebecca and swung her up in the air — *"Hoy huit!"*

"And how's the building getting on?" he asked the Swedes — Gustaf was a Swede himself, and made friends with them too. The building was getting on as best it could, with but themselves to the work. Why, then, he'd come and give them a hand himself, would Gustaf, though that was only said in jest.

"Ay, if you only would," said Inger. For the

cowshed ought to be ready by the autumn, when the cattle were brought in.

Gustaf let off a rocket, and having let off one, there was no sense in keeping the rest. As well let them off too — and so he did, half a dozen of them, and the women and children stood round breathless at the magic of the magician; and Inger had never seen a rocket before, but the wild fire of them somehow reminded her of the great world she had once seen. What was a sewing-machine to this? And when Gustaf finished up by playing his mouth-organ, Inger would have gone off along the road with him for sheer emotion. . . .

The mine is working now, and the ore is carted down by teams of horses to the sea; a steamer had loaded up one cargo and sailed away with it to South America, and another steamer waits already for the next load. Ay, 'tis a big concern. All the settlers have been up to look at the wonderful place, as many as can walk. Brede Olsen has been up, with his samples of stone, and got nothing for his pains, seeing that the mining expert was gone back to Sweden again. On Sundays, there was a crowd of people coming up all the way from the village; ay, even Axel Ström, who had no time to throw away, turned off from his proper road along the telegraph line to look at the place. Hardly a soul now but has seen the mine and its wonders. And at last Inger herself, Inger from Sellanraa, puts on her best, gold ring and all, and goes up to the hills.

What does she want there?

Nothing, does not even care to see how the work is done. Inger has come to show herself, that is all. When she saw the other women going up, she felt she must go too. A disfiguring scar on her upper lip, and grown children of her own, has Inger, but she must go as the others did. It irks her to think of the others, young women, ay . . . but she will try if she can't compete with them all the same. She has not begun to grow stout as yet, but has still a good figure enough, tall and natty enough; she can still look well. True, her colouring is not what it used to be, and her skin is not comparable to a golden peach — but they should see for all that; ay, they should say, after all, she was good enough!

They greet her kindly as she could wish; the workmen know her, she has given them many a drink of milk, and they show her over the mine, the huts, the stables and kitchens, the cellars and storesheds; the bolder men edge in close to her and take her lightly by the arm, but Inger does not feel hurt at all, it does her good. And where there are steps to go up or down, she lifts her skirts high, showing her legs a trifle; but she manages it quietly, as if without a thought. Ay, she's good enough, think the men to themselves.

Oh, but there is something touching about her, this woman getting on in years; plain to see that a glance from one of these warm-blooded menfolk came all unexpectedly to her; she was grateful for it, and returned it; she was a woman like other

women, and it thrilled her to feel so. An honest woman she had been, but like enough 'twas for lack of opportunity.

Getting on in years. . . .

Gustaf came up. Left two girls from the village, and a comrade, just to come. Gustaf knew what he was at, no doubt; he took Inger's hand with more warmth, more pressure than was needed, and thanked her for the last pleasant evening at Sellanraa, but he was careful not to plague her with attention.

"Well, Gustaf, and when are you coming to help us with the building?" says Inger, going red. And Gustaf says he will come sure enough before long. His comrades hear it, and put in a word that they'll all be coming down before long.

"Ho!" says Inger. "Aren't you going to stay on the mine, then, come winter?"

The men answer cautiously, that it doesn't look like it, but can't be sure. But Gustaf is bolder, and laughs and says, looks like they've scraped out the bit of copper there was.

"You'll not say that in earnest surely?" says Inger. And the other men put in that Gustaf had better be careful not to say any such thing.

But Gustaf was not going to be careful; he said a great deal more, and as for Inger, 'twas strange how he managed to win her for himself, for all that he never seemed to put himself forward that way. One of the other lads played a concertina, but 'twas not like Gustaf's mouth-organ; another lad again,

and a smart fellow he was too, tried to draw attention to himself by singing a song off by heart to the music, but that was nothing either, for all that he had a fine rolling voice. And a little while after, there was Gustaf, and if he hadn't got Inger's gold ring on his little finger! And how had it come about, when he never plagued nor pushed himself forward? Oh, he was forward enough in his way, but quiet with it all, as Inger herself; they did not talk of things, and she let him play with her hand as if without noticing. Later on, when she sat in one of the huts drinking coffee, there was a noise outside, high words between the men, and she knew it was about herself, and it warmed her. A pleasant thing to hear, for one no longer young, for a woman getting on in years.

And how did she come home from the hills that Sunday evening? Ho, well enough, virtuous as she had come, no more and no less. There was a crowd of men to see her home, the crowd of them that would not turn back as long as Gustaf was there; would not leave her alone with him, not if they knew it! Inger had never had such a gay time, not even in the days when she had been out in the world.

"Hadn't Inger lost something?" they asked at last.

"Lost something? No."

"A gold ring, for instance?"

And at that Gustaf had to bring it out; he was one against all, a whole army.

"Oh, 'twas a good thing you found it," said Inger,

and made haste to say good-bye to her escort.

She drew nearer Sellanraa, saw the many roofs of the buildings; it was her home that lay there. And she awoke once more, came back to herself, like the clever wife she was, and took a short cut through to the summer shed to look to the cattle. On the way she passes by a place she knows; a little child had once lain buried there; she had patted down the earth with her hands, set up a tiny cross — oh, but it was long ago. Now, she was wondering if those girls had finished their milking in good time. . . .

The work at the mine goes on, but there are whisperings of something wrong, the yield is not as good as it had promised. The mining expert, who had gone back home, came out again with another expert to help him; they went about blasting and boring and examining all the ground. What was wrong? The copper is fine enough, nothing wrong with that, but thin, and no real depth in it; getting thicker to the southward, lying deep and fine just where the company's holding reached its limit — and beyond that was *Almenning,* the property of the State. Well, the first purchasers had perhaps not thought so much of the thing, anyway. It was a family affair, some relatives who had bought the place as a speculation; they had not troubled to secure the whole range, all the miles to the next valley, no; they had but taken over a patch of ground from Isak Sellanraa and Geissler, and then sold it again.

And what was to be done now? The leading men, with the experts and the foremen, know well enough; they must start negotiations with the State at once. So they send a messenger off at full speed to Sweden, with letters and plans and charts, and ride away themselves down to the Lensmand below, to get the rights of the fjeld south of the water. And here their difficulties begin; the law stands in their way; they are foreigners, and cannot be purchasers in their own right. They knew all about that, and had made arrangements. But the southern side of the fjeld was sold already — and that they did not know. "Sold?"

"Ay, long ago, years back."

"Who bought it then?"

"Geissler."

"What Geissler? — oh, that fellow — h'm."

"And the title-deeds approved and registered," says the Lensmand. "'Twas bare rock, no more, and he got it for next to nothing."

"Who is this fellow Geissler that keeps cropping up? Where is he?"

"Heaven knows where he is now!"

And a new messenger is sent off to Sweden. They must find out all about this Geissler. Meanwhile, they could not keep on all the men; they must wait and see.

So Gustaf came down to Sellanraa, with all his worldly goods on his back, and here he was, he said. Ay, Gustaf had given up his work at the mine — that is to say, he had been a trifle too outspoken the

Sunday before, about the mine and the copper in the mine; the foreman had heard of it, and the engineer, and Gustaf was given his discharge. Well, goodbye then, and maybe 'twas the very thing he wanted; there could be nothing suspicious now about his coming to Sellanraa. They set him to work at once on the cowshed.

They worked and worked at the stone walls, and when a few days later another man came down from the mine, he was taken on too; now there were two spells, and the work went apace. Ay, they would have it ready by the autumn, never fear.

But now one after another of the miners came down, dismissed, and took the road to Sweden; the trial working was stopped for the present. There was something like a sigh from the folk in the village at the news; foolish folk, they did not understand what a trial working was, that it was only working on trial, but so it was. There were dark forebodings and discouragement among the village folk; money was scarcer, wages were reduced, things were very quiet at the trading station at Storborg. What did it all mean? Just when everything was going on finely, and Aronsen had got a flagstaff and a flag, and had bought a fine white bearskin for a rug to have in the sledge for the winter, and fine clothes for all the family. . . . Little matters these, but there were greater things happening as well. Here were two new men had bought up land for clearing in the wilds; high up between Maaneland and Sellanraa, and that was no small event for the whole of

that little outlying community. The two new settlers had built their turf huts and started clearing ground and digging. They were hard-working folk, and had done much in a little time. All that summer they had bought their provisions at Storborg, but when they came down now, last time, there was hardly anything to be had. Nothing in stock — and what did Aron want with heavy stocks of this and that now the work at the mine had stopped? He had hardly anything of any sort on the place now — only money. Of all the folk in the neighbourhood, Aronsen was perhaps the most dejected; his reckoning was all upset. When some one urged him to cultivate his land and live on that till better times, he answered: " Cultivate the land? 'Twas not that I came and set up house here for."

At last Aronsen could stand it no longer; he must go up to the mine and see for himself how things were. It was a Sunday. When he got to Sellanraa, he wanted Isak to go with him, but Isak had never yet set foot on the mine since they had started; he was more at home on the hillside below. Inger had to put in a word. " You might as well go with Aronsen, when he asks you," she said. And maybe Inger was not sorry to have him go; 'twas Sunday, and like as not she wanted to be rid of him for an hour or so. And so Isak went along.

There were strange things to be seen up there in the hills; Isak did not recognize the place at all now, with its huts and sheds, a whole town of them, and carts and waggons and great gaping holes in the

ground. The engineer himself showed them round. Maybe he was not in the best of humour just now, that same engineer, but he had tried all along to keep away the feeling of gloom that had fallen upon the village folk and the settlers round — and here was his chance, with no less persons than the Margrave of Sellanraa and the great trader from Storborg on the spot.

He explained the nature of the ore and the rocks in which it was found. Copper, iron, and sulphur, all were there together. Ay, they knew exactly what there was in the rocks up there — even gold and silver was there, though not so much of it. A mining engineer, he knows a deal of things.

"And it's all going to shut down now?" asked Aronsen.

"Shut down?" repeated the engineer in astonishment. "A nice thing that'd be for South America if we did!" No, they were discontinuing their preliminary operations for a while, only for a short time; they had seen what the place was like, what it could produce; then they could build their aerial railway and get to work on the southern side of the fjeld. He turned to Isak: "You don't happen to know where this Geissler's got to?"

"No."

Well, no matter — they'd get hold of him all right. And then they'd start to work again. Shut down? The idea!

Isak is suddenly lost in wonder and delight over a little machine that works with a treadle — simply

move your foot and it works. He understands it at once —'tis a little smithy to carry about on a cart and take down and set up anywhere you please.

"What's a thing like that cost, now?" he asks.

"That? Portable forge? Oh, nothing much." They had several of the same sort, it appeared, but nothing to what they had down at the sea; all sorts of machines and apparatus, huge big things. Isak was given to understand that mining, the making of valleys and enormous chasms in the rock, was not a business that could be done with your finger-nails — ha ha!

They stroll about the place, and the engineer mentions that he himself will be going across to Sweden in a few days' time.

"But you'll be coming back again?" says Aronsen.

Why, of course. Knew of no reason why the Government or the police should try to keep him.

Isak managed to lead round to the portable forge once more and stopped, looking at it again. "And what might a bit of a machine like that cost?" he asked.

Cost? Couldn't say off-hand — a deal of money, no doubt, but nothing to speak of in mining operations. Oh, a grand fellow was the engineer; not in the best of humour himself just then, perhaps, but he kept up appearances and played up rich and fine to the last. Did Isak want a forge? Well, he might take that one — the company would never trouble about a little thing like that — the company

would make him a present of a portable forge!

An hour after, Aronsen and Isak were on their way down again. Aronsen something calmer in mind — there was hope after all. Isak trundles down the hillside with his precious forge on his back. Ay, a barge of a man, he could bear a load! The engineer had offered to send a couple of men down with it to Sellanraa next morning, but Isak thanked him —'twas more than worth his while. He was thinking of his own folk; 'twould be a fine surprise for them to see him come walking down with a smithy on his back.

But 'twas Isak was surprised after all.

A horse and cart turned into the courtyard just as he reached home. And a highly remarkable load it brought. The driver was a man from the village, but beside him walked a gentleman at whom Isak stared in astonishment — it was Geissler.

Chapter V

THERE were other things that might have given Isak matter for surprise, but he was no great hand at thinking of more than one thing at a time. "Where's Inger?" was all he said as he passed by the kitchen door. He was only anxious to see that Geissler was well received.

Inger? Inger was out plucking berries; had been out plucking berries ever since Isak started — she and Gustaf the Swede. Ay, getting on in years, and all in love again and wild with it; autumn and winter near, but she felt the warmth in herself again, flowers and blossoming again. "Come and show where there's cloudberries," said Gustaf; "cranberries," said he. And how could a woman say no? Inger ran into her little room and was both earnest and religious for several minutes; but there was Gustaf standing waiting outside, the world was at her heels, and all she did was to tidy her hair, look at herself carefully in the glass, and out again. And what if she did? Who would not have done the same? Oh, a woman cannot tell one man from another; not always — not often.

And they two go out plucking berries, plucking cloudberries on the moorland, stepping from tuft to tuft, and she lifts her skirts high, and has her neat

legs to show. All quiet everywhere; the white grouse have their young ones grown already and do not fly up hissing any more; they are sheltered spots where bushes grow on the moors. Less than an hour since they started, and already they are sitting down to rest. Says Inger: "Oh, I didn't think you were like that?" Oh, she is all weakness towards him, and smiles piteously, being so deep in love — ay, a sweet and cruel thing to be in love, 'tis both! Right and proper to be on her guard — ay, but only to give in at last. Inger is so deep in love — desperately, mercilessly; her heart is full of kindliness towards him, she only cares to be close and precious to him.

Ay, a woman getting on in years. . . .

"When the work's finished, you'll be going off again," says she.

No, he wasn't going. Well, of course, some time, but not yet, not for a week or so.

"Hadn't we better be getting home?" says she.

"No."

They pluck more berries, and in a little while they find a sheltered place among the bushes, and Inger says: "Gustaf, you're mad to do it." And hours pass — they'll be sleeping now, belike, among the bushes. Sleeping? Wonderful — far out in the wilderness, in the Garden of Eden. Then suddenly Inger sits upright and listens: "Seems like I heard some one down on the road away off?"

The sun is setting, the tufts of heather darkening in shadow as they walk home. They pass by many

sheltered spots, and Gustaf sees them, and Inger, she sees them too no doubt, but all the time she feels as if some one were driving ahead of them. Oh, but who could walk all the way home with a wild handsome lad, and be on her guard all the time? Inger is too weak, she can only smile and say: "I never knew such a one."

She comes home alone. And well that she came just then, a fortunate thing. A minute later had not been well at all. Isak had just come into the courtyard with his forge, and Aronsen — and there is a horse and cart just pulled up.

"*Goddag,*" says Geissler, greeting Inger as well.

And there they stand, all looking one at another — couldn't be better. . . .

Geissler back again. Years now since he was there, but he is back again, aged a little, greyer a little, but bright and cheerful as ever. And finely dressed this time, with a white waistcoat and gold chain across. A man beyond understanding!

Had he an inkling, maybe, that something was going on up at the mine, and wanted to see for himself? Well, here he was. Very wide awake to look at, glancing round at the place, at the land, turning his head and using his eyes every way. There are great changes to note; the Margrave had extended his domains. And Geissler nods.

"What's that you're carrying?" he asks Isak. "'Tis a load for one horse in itself," says he

"'Tis for a forge," explains Isak. "And a mighty useful thing to have on a bit of a farm,"

says he — ay, calling Sellanraa a bit of a farm, no more!

"Where did you get hold of it?"

"Up at the mine. Engineer, he gave me the thing for a present, he said."

"The company's engineer?" says Geissler, as if he had not understood.

And Geissler, was he to be outdone by an engineer on a copper mine? "I've heard you'd got a mowing-machine," says he, "and I've brought along a patent raker thing that's handy to have." And he points to the load on the cart. There it stood, red and blue, a huge comb, a hayrake to be driven with horses. They lifted it out of the cart and looked at it; Isak harnessed himself to the thing and tried it over the ground. No wonder his mouth opened wide! Marvel on marvel coming to Sellanraa!

They spoke of the mine, of the work up in the hills. "They were asking about you, quite a lot," said Isak.

"Who?"

"The engineer, and all the other gentlemen. 'Have to get hold of you somehow,' they said."

Oh, but here Isak was saying overmuch, it seemed. Geissler was offended, no doubt; he turned sharp and curt, and said: "Well, I'm here, if they want me."

Next day came the two messengers back from Sweden, and with them a couple of the mineowners; on horseback they were, fine gentlemen and portly; mighty rich folk, by the look of them. They hardly stopped at Sellanraa at all, simply asked a question

or so about the road, without dismounting, and rode on up the hill. Geissler they pretended not to see, though he stood quite close. The messengers with their loaded packhorses rested for an hour, talked to the men at work on the building, learned that the old gentleman in the white waistcoat and gold chain was Geissler, and then they too went on again. But that same evening one of them came riding down to the place with a message by word of mouth for Geissler to come up to the gentlemen at the mines. " I'm here if they want me," was the answer Geissler sent back.

Geissler was grown an important personage, it seemed; thought himself a man of power, of all the power in the world; considered it, perhaps, beneath his dignity to be sent for by word of mouth. But how was it he had come to Sellanraa at all just then — just when he was most wanted? A great one he must be for knowing things, all manner of things. Anyway, when the gentlemen up at the mine had Geissler's answer, there was nothing for it but they must bestir themselves and come all the way down to Sellanraa again. The engineer and the two mining experts came with them.

So many crooked ways and turnings were there before that meeting was brought about. It looked ill to start with; ay, Geissler was over-lordly by far.

The gentlemen were polite enough this time; begged him to excuse their having sent a verbal message the day before, being tired out after their journey. Geissler was polite in return, and said he

too was tired out after his journey, or he would have come. Well, and then, to get to business: Would Geissler sell the land south of the water?

"Do you wish to purchase on your own account, may I ask," said Geissler, "or are you acting as agents?"

Now this could be nothing but sheer contrariness on Geissler's part; he could surely see for himself that rich and portly gentlemen of their stamp would not be acting as agents. They went on to discuss terms. "What about the price?" said they.

"The price? — yes," said Geissler, and sat thinking it over. "A couple of million," said he.

"Indeed?" said the gentlemen, and smiled. But Geissler did not smile.

The engineer and the two experts had made a rough investigation of the ground, made a few borings and blastings, and here was their report: the occurrence of ore was due to eruption; it was irregular, and from their preliminary examination appeared to be deepest in the neighbourhood of the boundary between the company's land and Geissler's decreasing from there onwards. For the last mile or so there was no ore to be found worth working.

Geissler listened to all this with the greatest nonchalance. He took some papers from his pocket, and looked at them carefully; but the papers were not charts nor maps — like as not they were things no way connected with the mine at all.

"You haven't gone deep enough," said he, as if it were something he had read in his papers. The gen-

tlemen admitted that at once, but the engineer asked: How did he know that —" You haven't made borings yourself, I suppose? "

And Geissler smiled, as if he had bored hundreds of miles down through the globe, and covered up the holes again after.

They kept at it till noon, talking it over this way and that, and at last began to look at their watches. They had brought Geissler down to half a million now, but not a hair's breadth farther. No; they must have put him out sorely some way or other. They seemed to think he was anxious to sell, obliged to sell, but he was not — ho, not a bit; there he sat, as easy and careless as themselves, and no mistaking it.

" Fifteen, say twenty thousand would be a decent price anyway," said they.

Geissler agreed that might be a decent price enough for any one sorely in need of the money, but five-and-twenty thousand would be better. And then one of the gentlemen put in — saying it perhaps by way of keeping Geissler from soaring too far: " By the way, I've seen your wife's people in Sweden — they sent their kind regards."

" Thank you," said Geissler.

" Well," said the other gentleman, seeing Geissler was not to be won over that way, " a quarter of a million . . . it's not gold we're buying, but copper ore."

" Exactly," said Geissler. " It's copper ore."

And at that they lost patience, all of them, and

five watch-cases were opened and snapped to again; no more time to fool away now; it was time for dinner. They did not ask for food at Sellanraa, but rode back to the mine to get their own.

And that was the end of the meeting.

Geissler was left alone.

What would be in his mind all this time — what was he pondering and speculating about? Nothing at all, maybe, but only idle and careless? No, indeed, he was thinking of something, but calm enough for all that. After dinner, he turned to Isak, and said: " I'm going for a long walk over my land up there; and I'd have liked to have Sivert with me, same as last time."

" Ay, so you shall," said Isak at once.

" No; he's other things to do, just now."

" He shall go with you at once," said Isak, and called to Sivert to leave his work. But Geissler held up his hand, and said shortly: " No."

He walked round the yard several times, came back and talked to the men at their work, chatting easily with them and going off and coming back again. And all the time with this weighty matter on his mind, yet talking as if it were nothing at all. Geissler had long been so long accustomed to changes of fortune, maybe he was past feeling there was anything at stake now, whatever might be in the air.

Here he was, the man he was, by the merest chance. He had sold the first little patch of land to his wife's relations, and what then? Gone off and bought up the whole tract south of the water —

what for? Was it to annoy them by making himself their neighbour? At first, no doubt, he had only thought of taking over a little strip of the land there, just where the new village would have to be built if the workings came to anything, but in the end he had come to be owner of the whole fjeld. The land was to be had for next to nothing, and he did not want a lot of trouble with boundaries. So, from sheer idleness he had become a mining king, a lord of the mountains; he had thought of a site for huts and machine sheds, and it had become a kingdom, stretching right down to the sea.

In Sweden, the first little patch of land had passed from hand to hand, and Geissler had taken care to keep himself informed as to its fate. The first purchasers, of course, had bought foolishly, bought without sense or forethought; the family council were not mining experts, they had not secured enough land at first, thinking only of buying out a certain Geissler, and getting rid of him. But the new owners were no less to be laughed at; mighty men, no doubt, who could afford to indulge in a jest, and take up land for amusement's sake, for a drunken wager, or Heaven knows what. But when it came to trial workings, and exploiting the land in earnest, then suddenly they found themselves butting up against a wall — Geissler.

Children! thought Geissler, maybe, in his lofty mind; he felt his power now, felt strong enough to be short and abrupt with folk. The others had cer-

tainly done their best to take him down a peg; they imagined they were dealing with a man in need of money, and threw out hints of some fifteen or twenty thousand — ay, children. They did not know Geissler. And now here he stood.

They came down no more that day from the fjeld, thinking best, no doubt, not to show themselves over-anxious. Next morning they came down, pack-horses and all, on their way home. And lo — Geissler was not there.

Not there?

That put an end to any ideas they might have had of settling the manner in lordly wise, from the saddle; they had to dismount and wait. And where was Geissler, if you please? Nobody could tell them; he went about everywhere, did Geissler, took an interest in Sellanraa and all about it; the last they had seen of him was up at the sawmill. The messengers were sent out to look for him, but Geissler must have gone some distance, it seemed, for he gave no answer when they shouted. The gentlemen looked at their watches, and were plainly annoyed at first, and said: "We're not going to fool about here waiting like this. If Geissler wants to sell, he must be on the spot." Oh, but they changed their tone in a little while; showed no annoyance after a while, but even began to find something amusing in it all, to jest about it. Here were they in a desperate case; they would have to lie out there in the desolate hills all night. And get lost and starve to

death in the wilds, and leave their bones to bleach undiscovered by their mourning kin — ay, they made a great jest of it all.

At last Geissler came. Had been looking round a bit — just come from the cattle enclosure. "Looks as if that'll be too small for you soon," said he to Isak. "How many head have you got up there now altogether?" Ay, he could talk like that, with those fine gentlemen standing there watch in hand. Curiously red in the face was Geissler, as if he had been drinking. "Puh!" said he. "I'm all hot, walking."

"We half expected you would be here when we came," said one of the gentlemen.

"I had no word of your wanting to see me at all," answered Geissler, "otherwise I might have been here on the spot."

Well, and what about the business now? Was Geissler prepared to accept a reasonable offer to-day? It wasn't every day he had a chance of fifteen or twenty thousand — what? Unless, of course . . . If the money were nothing to him, why, then . . .

This last suggestion was not to Geissler's taste at all; he was offended. A nice way to talk! Well, they would not have said it, perhaps, if they had not been annoyed at first; and Geissler, no doubt, would hardly have turned suddenly pale at their words if he had not been out somewhere by himself and got red. As it was, he paled, and answered coldly:

"I don't wish to make any suggestion as to what you, gentlemen, may be in a position to pay — but I know what I am willing to accept and what not. I've no use for more child's prattle about the mine. My price is the same as yesterday."

"A quarter of a million *Kroner*?"

"Yes."

The gentlemen mounted their horses. "Look here," said one, "we'll go this far, and say twenty-five thousand."

"You're still inclined to joke, I see," said Geissler. "But I'll make *you* an offer in sober earnest: would you care to sell your bit of a mine up there?"

"Why," said they, somewhat taken aback — "why, we might do that, perhaps."

"I'm ready to buy it," said Geissler.

Oh, that Geissler! With the courtyard full of people now, listening to every word; all the Sellanraa folk, and the stoneworkers and the messengers. Like as not, he could never have raised the money, nor anything near it, for such a deal; but, again, who could say? A man beyond understanding was Geissler. Anyhow, his last words rather disconcerted those gentlemen on horseback. Was it a trick? Did he reckon to make his own land seem worth more by this manœuvre?

The gentlemen thought it over; ay, they even began to talk softly together about it; they got down from their horses again. Then the engineer put in a word; he thought, no doubt, it was getting beyond all bearing. And he seemed to have some power,

some kind of authority here. And the yard was full of folk all listening to what was going on. "We'll not sell," said he.

"Not?" asked his companions.

"No."

They whispered together again, and they mounted their horses once more — in earnest this time. "Twenty-five thousand!" called out one of them. Geissler did not answer, but turned away, and went over to talk to the stoneworkers again.

And that was the end of their last meeting.

Geissler appeared to care nothing for what might come of it. He walked about talking of this, that, and the other; for the moment he seemed chiefly interested in the laying of some heavy beams across the shell of the new cowhouse. They were to get the work finished that week, with a temporary roof — a new fodder loft was to be built up over later on.

Isak kept Sivert away from the building work now, and left him idle — and this he did with a purpose, that Geissler might find the lad ready at any time if he wanted to go exploring with him in the hills. But Isak might have saved himself the trouble; Geissler had given up the idea, or perhaps forgotten all about it. What he did was to get Inger to pack him up some food, and set off down the road. He stayed away till evening.

He passed the two new clearings that had been started below Sellanraa, and talked to the men there; went right down to Maaneland to see what Axel Ström had got done that year. Nothing very great,

it seemed; not as much as he might have wished, but he had put in some good work on the land. Geissler took an interest in this place, too, and asked him: "Got a horse?"

"Ay."

"Well, I've a mowing-machine and a harrow down south, both new; I'll send them up, if you like."

"How?" asked Axel, unable to conceive such magnificence, and thinking vaguely of payment by instalments.

"I mean I'll make you a present of them," said Geissler.

"'Tis hard to believe," said Axel.

"But you'll have to help those two neighbours of yours up above, breaking new land."

"Ay, never fear for that," said Axel; he could still hardly make out what Geissler meant by it all. "So you've machines and things down south?"

"I've a deal of things to look after," said Geissler. Now, as a matter of fact, Geissler had no great deal of things to look after, but he liked to make it appear so. As for a mowing-machine and a harrow, he could buy them in any of the towns, and send up from there.

He stayed talking a long while with Axel Ström about the other settlers near; of Storborg, the trading station; of Axel's brother, newly married, who had come to Breidablik, and had started draining the moors and getting the water out. Axel complained that it was impossible to get a woman any-

where to help; he had none but an old creature, by name Oline; not much good at the best of times, but he might be thankful to have her as long as she stayed. Axel had been working day and night part of that summer. He might, perhaps, have got a woman from his own parts, from Helgeland, but that would have meant paying for her journey, besides wages. A costly business all round. Axel further told how he had taken over the inspection of the telegraph line, but rather wished he had left it alone.

"That sort of thing's only fit for Brede and his like," said Geissler.

"Ay, that's a true word," Axel admitted. "But there was the money to think of."

"How many cows have you got?"

"Four. And a young bull. 'Twas too far to go up to Sellanraa to theirs."

But there was a far weightier matter Axel badly wanted to talk over with Geissler; Barbro's affair had come to light, somehow, and an investigation was in progress. Come to light? Of course it had. Barbro had been going about, evidently with child and plain to see, and she had left the place by herself all unencumbered and no child at all. How had it come about?

When Geissler understood what the matter was, he said quite shortly: "Come along with me." And he led Axel with him away from the house. Geissler put on an important air, as one in authority.

They sat down at the edge of the wood, and Geissler said: "Now, then, tell me all about it."

Come to light? Of course it had; how could it be helped? The place was no longer a desert, with never a soul for miles; and, moreover, Oline was there. What had Oline to do with it? Ho! and, to make things worse, Brede Olsen had made an enemy of her himself. No means of getting round Oline now; here she was on the spot, and could worm things out of Axel a bit at a time. 'Twas just such underhand work she lived for; ay, lived by, in some degree. And here was the very thing for her — trust Oline for scenting it out! Truth to tell, Oline was grown too old now to keep house and tend cattle at Maaneland; she ought to have given it up. But how could she? How could she leave a place where a fine, deep mystery lay simply waiting to be brought to light? She managed the winter's work; ay, she got through the summer, too, and it was a marvel of strength she gained from the mere thought of being able one day to show up a daughter of Brede himself. The snow was not gone from the fields that spring before Oline began poking about. She found the little green mound by the stream, and saw at once that the turf had been laid down in squares. She had even had the luck to come upon Axel one day standing by the little grave, and treading it down. So Axel knew all about it! And Oline nodded her grey head — ay, it was her turn now!

Not but Axel was a kindly man enough to live with, but miserly; counted his cheeses, and kept good note of every tuft of wool; Oline could not do as she liked with things, not by a long way. And then that matter of the accident last year, when she had saved him — if Axel had been the right sort, he would have given her the credit for it all, and acknowledged his debt to her alone. But not a bit of it — Axel still held to the division he had made on the spot. Ay, he would say, if Oline hadn't happened to come along, he would have had to lie out there in the cold all night; but Brede, he'd been a good help too, on the way home. And that was all the thanks she got! Oline was full of indignation — surely the Lord Almighty must turn away His face from His creatures! How easy it would have been for Axel to lead out a cow from its stall, and bring it to her and say: "Here's a cow for you, Oline." But no. Not a word of it.

Well, let him wait — wait and see if it might not come to cost him more than the worth of a cow in the end!

All through that summer, Oline kept a look-out for every passer-by, and whispered to them and nodded and confided things to them in secret. "But never a word I've said," so she charged them every time. Oline went down to the village, too, more than once. And now there were rumours and talk of things about the place, ay, drifting like a fog, settling on faces and getting into ears; even the children going to school at Breidablik began nodding

secrets among themselves. And at last the Lensmand had to take it up; had to bestir himself and report it, and ask for instructions. Then he came up with a book to write in and an assistant to help him; came up to Maaneland one day and investigated things and wrote things down, and went back again. But three weeks after, he came up once more, investigating and writing down again, and this time, he opened a little green mound by the stream, and took out the body of a child. Oline was an invaluable help to him; and in return he had to answer a host of questions she put. Among other things, he said yes, it might perhaps come to having Axel arrested too. At that, Oline clasped her hands in dismay at all the wickedness she had got mixed up with here, and only wished she were out of the place, far away from it all. "But the girl," she whispered, "what about Barbro herself?"

"The girl Barbro," said the Lensmand, "she's under arrest now in Bergen. The law must take its course," said he. And he took the little body and went back again to the village. . . .

Little wonder, then, that Axel Ström was anxious. He had spoken out to the Lensmand and denied nothing; he was in part responsible for the coming of the child at all, and in addition, he had dug a grave for it. And now he was asking Geissler what he had better do next. Would he have to go in to the town, to a new and worse examination, and be tortured there?

Geissler was not the man he had been — no; and

the long story had wearied him, he seemed duller now, whatever might be the cause. He was not the bright and confident soul he had been that morning. He looked at his watch, got up, and said:

"This'll want thinking over. I'll go into it thoroughly and let you know before I leave."

And Geissler went off.

He came back to Sellanraa that evening, had a little supper, and went to bed. Slept till late next morning, slept, rested thoroughly; he was tired, no doubt, after his meeting with the Swedish mine-owners. Not till two days after did he make ready to leave. He was his lordly self again by then, paid liberally for his keep, and gave little Rebecca a shining *Krone*.

He made a speech to Isak, and said: "It doesn't matter in the least if nothing came of the deal this time, it'll come all right later on. For the present, I'm going to stop the working up there and leave it a bit. As for those fellows — children! Thought they would teach me, did they? Did you hear what they offered me? Twenty-five thousand!"

"Ay," said Isak.

"Well," said Geissler, and waved his hand as if dismissing all impertinent offers of insignificant sums from his mind, "well, it won't do any harm to the district if I do stop the working there a bit — on the contrary, it'll teach folk to stick to their land. But they'll feel it in the village. They made a pile of money there last summer; fine clothes and fine

living for all — but there's an end of that now. Ay, it might have been worth their while, the good folks down there, to have kept in with me; things might have been different then. Now, it'll be as I please."

But for all that, he did not look much of a man to control the fate of villages, as he went away. He carried a parcel of food in his hand, and his white waistcoat was no longer altogether clean. His good wife might have equipped him for the journey up this time out of the rest of the forty thousand she had once got — who could say, perhaps she had. Anyhow, he was going back poor enough.

He did not forget to look in at Axel Ström on the way down, and give the results of his thinking over. " I've been looking at it every way," said he. " The matter's in abeyance for the present, so there's nothing to be done just yet. You'll be called up for a further examination, and you'll have to say how things are. . . ."

Words, nothing more. Geissler had probably never given the matter a thought at all. And Axel agreed dejectedly to all he said. But at last Geissler flickered up into a mighty man again, puckered his brows, and said thoughtfully: " Unless, perhaps, I could manage to come to town myself and watch the proceedings."

" Ay, if you'd be so good," said Axel.

Geissler decided in a moment. " I'll see if I can manage it, if I can get the time. But I've a heap of

things to look after down south. I'll come if I can. Good-bye for now. I'll send you those machines all right."

And Geissler went.

Would he ever come again?

Chapter VI

THE rest of the workmen came down from the mine. Work is stopped. The fjeld lies dead again.

The building at Sellanraa, too, is finished now. There is a makeshift roof of turf put on for the winter; the great space beneath is divided into rooms, bright apartments, a great salon in the middle and large rooms at either end, as if it were for human beings. Here Isak once lived in a turf hut together with a few goats — there is no turf hut to be seen now at Sellanraa.

Loose boxes, mangers, and bins are fitted up. The two stoneworkers are still busy, kept on to get the whole thing finished as soon as possible, but Gustaf is no hand at woodwork, so he says, and he is leaving. Gustaf has been a splendid lad at the stonework, heaving and lifting like a bear; and in the evenings, a joy and delight to all, playing his mouth-organ, not to speak of helping the womenfolk, carrying heavy pails to and from the river. But he is going now. No, Gustaf is no hand at woodwork, so he says. It looks almost as if he were in a hurry to get away.

" Can't it wait till tomorrow? " says Inger.

No, it can't wait, he's no more work to do here,

and besides, going now, he will have company across the hills, going over with the last gang from the mines.

"And who's to help me with my buckets now?" says Inger, smiling sadly.

But Gustaf is never at a loss, he has his answer ready, and says "Hjalmar." Now Hjalmar was the younger of the two stoneworkers, but neither of them was young as Gustaf himself, none like him in any way.

"Hjalmar — huh!" says Inger contemptuously. Then suddenly she changes her tone, and turns to Gustaf, thinking to make him jealous. "Though, after all, he's nice to have on the place, is Hjalmar," says she, "and so prettily he sings and all."

"Don't think much of him, anyway," says Gustaf. He does not seem jealous in the least.

"But you might stay one more night at least?"

No, Gustaf couldn't stay one more night — he was going across with the others.

Ay, maybe Gustaf was getting tired of the game by now. 'Twas a fine thing to snap her up in front of all the rest, and have her for his own the few weeks he was there — but he was going elsewhere now, like as not to a sweetheart at home — he had other things in view. Was he to stay on loafing about here for the sake of her? He had reason enough for bringing the thing to an end, as she herself must know; but she was grown so bold, so thoughtless of any consequence, she seemed to care for nothing. No, things had not held for so very

long between them — but long enough to last out the spell of his work there.

Inger is sad and down-hearted enough; ay, so erringly faithful that she mourns for him. 'Tis hard for her; she is honestly in love, without any thought of vanity or conquest. And not ashamed, no; she is a strong woman full of weakness; she is but following the law of nature all about her; it is the glow of autumn in her as in all things else. Her breast heaves with feeling as she packs up food for Gustaf to take with him. No thought of whether she has the right, of whether she dare risk this or that; she gives herself up to it entirely, hungry to taste, to enjoy. Isak might lift her up to the roof and thrust her to the floor again — ay, what of that! It would not make her feel the less.

She goes out with the parcel to Gustaf.

Now she had set the bucket by the steps on purpose, in case he should care to go with her to the river just once more. Maybe she would like to say something, to give him some little thing — her gold ring; Heaven knows, she was in a state to do anything. But there must be an end of it some time; Gustaf thanks her, says good-bye, and goes.

And there she stands.

"Hjalmar!" she calls out aloud — oh, so much louder than she need. As if she were determined to be gay in spite of all — or crying out in distress.

Gustaf goes on his way. . . .

All through that autumn there was the usual work

in the fields all round, right away down to the village: potatoes to be taken up, corn to be got in, the horned cattle let loose over the ground. Eight farms there are now and all are busy; but at the trading station, at Storborg, there are no cattle, and no green lands, only a garden. And there is no trade there now, and nothing for any to be busy about there.

They have a new root crop at Sellanraa called turnips, sending up a colossal growth of green waving leaves out of the earth, and nothing can keep the cows away from them — the beasts break down all hedgework, and storm in, bellowing. Nothing for it but to set Leopoldine and little Rebecca to keep guard over the turnip fields, and little Rebecca walks about with a big stick in her hand and is a wonder at driving cows away. Her father is at work close by; now and again he comes up to feel her hands and feet, and ask if she is cold. Leopoldine is big and grown up now; she can knit stockings and mittens for the winter while she is watching the herds. Born in Thondhjem, was Leopoldine, and came to Sellanraa five years old. But the memory of a great town with many people and of a long voyage on a steamer is slipping away from her now, growing more and more distant; she is a child of the wilds and knows nothing now of the great world beyond the village down below where she has been to church once or twice, and where she was confirmed the year before. . . .

And the little casual work of every day goes on, with this thing and that to be done beside; as, for instance, the road down below, that is getting bad one or two places. The ground is still workable, and Isak goes down one day with Sivert, ditching and draining the road. There are two patches of bog to be drained.

Axel Ström has promised to take part in the work, seeing that he has a horse and uses the road himself — but Axel had pressing business in the town just then. Heaven knows what it could be, but very pressing, he said it was. But he had asked his brother from Breidablik to work with them in his stead.

Fredrik was this brother's name. A young man, newly married, a light-hearted fellow who could make a jest, but none the worse for that; Sivert and he are something alike. Now Fredrik had looked in at Storborg on his way up that morning, Aronsen of Storborg being his nearest neighbour, and he is full of all the trader has been telling him. It began this way; Fredrik wanted a roll of tobacco. "I'll give you a roll of tobacco when I have one," said Aronsen.

"What, you've no tobacco in the place?"

"No, nor won't order any. There's nobody to buy it. What d'you think I make out of one roll of tobacco?"

Ay, Aronsen had been in a nasty humour that morning, sure enough; felt he had been cheated

somehow by that Swedish mining concern. Here had he set up a store out in the wilds, and then they go and shut down the work altogether!

Fredrik smiles slyly at Aronsen, and makes fun of him now. "He's not so much as touched that land of his," says he, "and hasn't even feed for his beasts, but must go and buy it. Asked me if I'd any hay to sell. No, I'd no hay to sell. 'Ho, d'you mean you don't want to make money?' said Aronsen. Thinks money's everything in the world, seems like. Puts down a hundred-*Krone* note on the counter, and says 'Money!' 'Ay, money's well enough,' says I. 'Cash down,' says he. Ay, he's just a little bit touched that way, so to speak, and his wife she goes about with a watch and chain and all on weekdays — Lord He knows what can be she's so set on remembering to the minute."

Says Sivert: "Did Aronsen say anything about a man named Geissler?"

"Ay. Said something about he'd be wanting to sell some land he'd got. And Aronsen was wild about it, he was —'fellow that used to be Lensmand and got turned out,' he said, and 'like as not without so much as a five *Krone* in his books, and ought to be shot!' 'Ay, but wait a bit,' says I, 'and maybe he'll sell after all.' 'Nay,' says Aronsen, 'don't you believe it. I'm a business man,' says he, 'and I know — when one party puts up a price of two hundred and fifty thousand, and the other offers twenty-five thousand, there's too big a difference; there'll be no deal ever come out of that.

Well, let 'em go their own way, and see what comes of it,' says he. 'I only wish I'd never set my foot in this hole, and a poor thing it's been for me and mine.' Then I asked him if he didn't think of selling out himself. 'Ay,' says he, 'that's just what I'm thinking of. This bit of bogland,' says he, 'a hole and a desert — I'm not making a single *Krone* the whole day now,' says he."

They laughed at Aronsen, and had no pity for him at all.

"Think he'll sell out?" asks Isak.

"Well, he did speak of it. And he's got rid of the lad he had already. Ay, a curious man, a queer sort of man, that Aronsen, 'tis sure. Sends away his lad could be working on the place getting in winter fuel and carting hay with that horse of his, but keeps on his storeman — chief clerk, he calls him. 'Tis true enough, as he says, not selling so much as a *Krone* all day, for he's no stock in the place at all. And what does he want with a chief clerk, then? I doubt it'll be just by way of looking grand and making a show, must have a man there to stand at a desk and write up things in books. Ha ha ha! ay, looks like he's just a little bit touched that way, is Aronsen."

The three men worked till noon, ate food from their baskets, and talked a while. They had matters of their own to talk over, matters of good and ill to folk on the land; no trifles, to them, but things to be discussed warily; they are clear-minded folk, their nerves unworn, and not flying out where they

should not. It is the autumn season now, a silence in the woods all round; the hills are there, the sun is there, and at evening the moon and the stars will come; all regular and certain, full of kindliness, an embrace. Men have time to rest here, to lie in the heather, with an arm for a pillow.

Fredrik talks of Breidablik, how 'tis but little he's got done there yet awhile.

"Nay," says Isak, "'tis none so little already, I saw when I was down that way."

This was praise from the oldest among them, the giant himself, and Fredrik might well be pleased. He asks frankly enough: "Did you think so, now? Well, it'll be better before long. I've had a deal of things to hinder this year; the house to do up, being leaky and like to fall to pieces; hayloft to take down and put up again, and no sort of room in the turf hut for beasts, seeing I'd cow and heifer more than Brede he'd ever had in his time," says Fredrik proudly.

"And you're thriving like, up here?" asks Isak.

"Ay, I'll not say no. And wife, she's thriving too, why shouldn't we? There's good room and outlook all about; we can see up and down the road both ways. And a neat little copse by the house all pretty to look at, birch and willow — I'll plant a bit more other side of the house when I've time. And it's fine to see how the bogland's dried only since last year's ditching —'tis all a question now what'll grow on her this year. Ay, thrive? When

we've house and home and land and all —'tis enough for the two of us surely."

"Ho," says Sivert slyly, "and the two of you — is that all there's ever to be?"

"Why, as to that," says Fredrik bravely, "'tis like enough there'll be more to come. And as to thriving — well, the wife's not falling off anyway, by the looks of her."

They work on until evening, drawing up now and again to straighten their backs, and exchange a word or so.

"And so you didn't get the tobacco?" says Sivert.

"No, that's true. But 'twas no loss, for I've no use for it, anyway," says Fredrik.

"No use for tobacco?"

"Nay. 'Twas but for to drop in at Aronsen's like, and hear what he'd got to say." And the two jesters laughed together at that.

On the way home, father and son talk little, as was their way; but Isak must have been thinking out something for himself; he says:

"Sivert?"

"Ay?" says Sivert again.

"Nay, 'twas nothing."

They walk on a good ways, and Isak begins again:

"How's he get on, then, with his trading, Aronsen, when he's nothing to trade with?"

"Nay," says Sivert. "But there's not folk enough here now for him to buy for."

"Ho, you think so? Why, I suppose 'tis so, ay, well . . ."

Sivert wondered a little at this. After a while his father went on again:

"There's but eight places now in all, but there might be more before long. More . . . well, I don't know . . ."

Sivert wondering more than ever — what can his father be getting at? The pair of them walk on a long way in silence; they are nearly home now.

"H'm," says Isak. "What you think Aronsen he'd ask for that place of his now?"

"Ho, that's it!" says Sivert. "Want to buy it, do you?" he asks jestingly. But suddenly he understands what it all means: 'tis Eleseus the old man has in mind. Oh, he's not forgotten him after all, but kept him faithfully in mind, just as his mother, only in his own way, nearer earth, and nearer to Sellanraa.

"'Twill be going for a reasonable price, I doubt," says Sivert. And when Sivert says so much, his father knows the lad has read his thought. And as if in fear of having spoken out too clearly, he falls to talking of their road-mending; a good thing they had got it done at last.

For a couple of days after that, Sivert and his mother were putting their heads together and holding councils and whispering — ay, they even wrote a letter. And when Saturday came round Sivert suddenly wanted to go down to the village.

"What you want to go down village again for now?" said his father in displeasure. "Wearing boots to rags. . . ." Oh, Isak was more bitter

than need be; he knew well enough that Sivert was going to the post.

"Going to church," says Sivert.

'Twas all he could find by way of excuse, and his father muttered: "Well, what you want to go for . . . ?"

But if Sivert was going to church, why, he might harness up and take little Rebecca with him. Little Rebecca, ay, surely she might have that bit of a treat for once in her life, after being so clever guarding turnips and being all ways the pearl and blessing of them all, ay, that she was. And they harnessed up, and Rebecca had the maid Jensine to look after her on the way, and Sivert said never a word against that either.

While they are away, it so happens that Aronsen's man, his chief clerk, from Storborg, comes up the road. What does this mean? Why, nothing very much, 'tis only Andresen, the chief clerk from Storborg, come up for a bit of a walk this way — his master having sent him. Nothing more. And no great excitement among the folk at Sellanraa over that —'twas not as in the old days, when a stranger was a rare sight on their new land, and Inger made a great to-do. No, Inger's grown quieter now, and keeps to herself these days.

A strange thing that book of devotion, a guide upon the way, an arm round one's neck, no less. When Inger had lost hold of herself a little, lost her way a little out plucking berries, she found her way home again by the thought of her little chamber and

the holy book; ay, she was humble now and a God-fearing soul. She can remember long years ago when she would say an evil word if she pricked her finger sewing — so she had learned to do from her fellow-workers round the big table in the Institute. But now she pricks her finger, and it bleeds, and she sucks the blood away in silence. 'Tis no little victory gained to change one's nature so. And Inger did more than that. When all the workmen were gone, and the stone building was finished, and Sellanraa was all forsaken and still, then came a critical time for Inger; she cried a deal, and suffered much. She blamed none but herself for it all, and she was deeply humbled. If only she could have spoken out to Isak, and relieved her mind, but that was not their way at Sellanraa; there was none of them would talk their feelings and confess things. All she could do was to be extra careful in the way she asked her husband to come in to meals, going right up to him to say it nicely, instead of shouting from the door. And in the evenings, she looked over his clothes, and sewed buttons on. Ay, and even more she did. One night she lifted up on her elbow and said:

"Isak?"

"What is it?" says Isak.

"Are you awake?"

"Ay."

"Nay, 'twas nothing," says Inger. "But I've not been all as I ought."

"What?" says Isak. Ay, so much he said, and rose up on his elbow in turn.

They lay there, and went on talking. Inger is a matchless woman, after all; and with a full heart, "I've not been as I ought towards you," she says, "and I'm that sorry about it."

The simple words move him; this barge of a man is touched, ay, he wants to comfort her, knowing nothing of what is the matter, but only that there is none like her. "Naught to cry about, my dear," says Isak. "There's none of us can be as we ought."

"Nay, 'tis true," she answers gratefully. Oh, Isak had a strong, sound way of taking things; straightened them out, he did, when they turned crooked. "None of us can be as we ought." Ay, he was right. The god of the heart — for all that he is a god, he goes a deal of crooked ways, goes out adventuring, the wild thing that he is, and we can see it in his looks. One day rolling in a bed of roses and licking his lips and remembering things; next day with a thorn in his foot, desperately trying to get it out. Die of it? Never a bit, he's as well as ever. A nice look-out it would be if he were to die!

And Inger's trouble passed off too; she got over it, but she keeps on with her hours of devotion, and finds a merciful refuge there. Hard-working and patient and good she is now every day, knowing Isak different from all other men, and wanting none but him. No gay young spark of a singer, true, in his

looks and ways, but good enough, ay, good enough indeed! And once more it is seen that the fear of the Lord and contentment therewith are a precious gain.

And now it was that the little chief clerk from Storborg, Andresen, came up to Sellanraa one Sunday, and Inger was not in the least affected, far from it; she did not so much as go in herself to give him a mug of milk, but sent Leopoldine in with it, by reason that Jensine the maid was out. And Leopoldine could carry a mug of milk as well as need be, and she gave it him and said, "Here you are," and blushed, for all she was wearing her Sunday clothes and had nothing to be ashamed of, anyway.

"Thanks, 'tis overkind of you," says Andresen. "Is your father at home?" says he.

"Ay; he'll be about the place somewhere."

Andresen drank and wiped his mouth with a handkerchief and looked at the time. "Is it far up to the mines?" he asked.

"No, 'tis an hour's walk, or hardly that."

"I'm going up to look over them, d'you see, for him, Aronsen — I'm his chief clerk."

"Ho!"

"You'll know me yourself, no doubt; I'm Aronsen's chief clerk. You've been down buying things at our place before."

"Ay."

"And I remember you well enough," says Andresen. "You've been down twice buying things."

" 'Tis more than could be thought, you'd remember that," says Leopoldine, and had no more strength after that, but stood holding by a chair.

But Andresen had strength enough, he went on, and said: " Remember you? Well, of course I should." And he said more:

" You wouldn't like to walk up to the mine with me? " said he.

And a little after something went wrong with Leopoldine's eyes; everything turned red and strange about her, and the floor was slipping away from under, and Chief Clerk Andresen was talking from somewhere ever so far off. Saying: " Couldn't you spare the time? "

" No," says she.

And Heaven knows how she managed to get out of the kitchen again. Her mother looked at her and asked what was the matter. "Nothing," said Leopoldine.

Nothing, no, of course. But now, look you, 'twas Leopoldine's turn to be affected, to begin the same eternal round. She was well fitted for the same, overgrown and pretty and newly confirmed; an excellent sacrifice she would make. A bird is fluttering in her young breast, her long hands are like her mother's, full of tenderness, full of sex. Could she dance? — ay, indeed she could. A marvel where she had managed to learn it, but learn it they did at Sellanraa as well as elsewhere. Sivert could dance, and Leopoldine too; a kind of dancing peculiar to the spot, growth

of the new-cleared soil; a dance with energy and swing: schottische, mazurka, waltz and polka in one. And could not Leopoldine deck herself out and fall in love and dream by daylight all awake? Ay, as well as any other! The day she stood in church she was allowed to borrow her mother's gold ring to wear; no sin in that, 'twas only neat and nice; and the day after, going to her communion, she did not get the ring on till it was over. Ay, she might well show herself in church with a gold ring on her finger, being the daughter of a great man on the place — the Margrave.

When Andresen came down from the mine, he found Isak at Sellanraa, and they asked him in, gave him dinner and a cup of coffee. All the folk on the place were in there together now, and took part in the conversation. Andresen explained that his master, Aronsen, had sent him up to see how things were at the mines, if there was any sign of beginning work there again soon. Heaven knows, maybe Andresen sat there lying all the time, about being sent by his master; he might just as well have hit on it for his own account — and anyway, he couldn't have been at the mines at all in the little time he'd been away.

"'Tis none so easy to see from outside if they're going to start work again," said Isak.

No, Andresen admitted that was so; but Aronsen had sent him, and after all, two pair of eyes could see better than one.

But here Inger seemingly could contain herself

no longer; she asked: "Is it true what they're saying, Aronsen is going to sell his place again?"

Andresen answers: "He's thinking of it. And a man like him can surely do as he likes, seeing all the means and riches he's got."

"Ho, is he so rich, then?"

"Ay," says Andresen, nodding his head; "rich enough, and that's a true word."

Again Inger cannot keep silence, but asks right out:

"I wonder, now, what he'd be asking for the place?"

Isak puts in a word here; like as not he's more curious to know than Inger herself, but it must not seem that the idea of buying Storborg is any thought of his; he makes himself a stranger to it, and says now:

"Why, what you want to know for, Inger?"

"I was but asking," says she. And both of them look at Andresen, waiting. And he answers:

Answers cautiously enough that as to the price, he can say nothing of that, but he knows what Aronsen says the place has cost him.

"And how much is that?" asks Inger, having no strength to keep her peace and be silent.

"'Tis sixteen hundred *Kroner*," says Andresen.

Ho, and Inger claps her hands at once to hear it, for if there is one thing womenfolk have no sense nor thought of, 'tis the price of land and properties. But, anyway, sixteen hundred *Kroner* is no small sum for folk in the wilds, and Inger has but one fear,

that Isak may be frightened off the deal. But Isak, he sits there just exactly like a fjeld, and says only: "Ay, it's the big houses he's put up."

"Ay," says Andresen again, "'tis just that. 'Tis the fine big houses and all."

Just when Andresen is making ready to go, Leopoldine slips out by the door. A strange thing, but somehow she cannot bring herself to think of shaking hands with him. So she has found a good place, standing in the new cowshed, looking out of a window. And with a blue silk ribbon round her neck, that she hadn't been wearing before, and a wonder she ever found time to put it on now. There he goes, a trifle short and stout, spry on his feet, with a light, full beard, eight or ten years older than herself. Ay, none so bad-looking to her mind!

And then the party came back from church late on Sunday night. All had gone well, little Rebecca had slept the last few hours of the way up, and was lifted from the cart and carried indoors without waking. Sivert has heard a deal of news, but when his mother asks, "Well, what you've got to tell?" he only says: "Nay, nothing much. Axel he's got a mowing-machine and a harrow."

"What's that?" says his father, all interested. "Did you see them?"

"Ay, I saw them right enough. Down on the quay."

"Ho! So that was what he must go in to town for," says his father. And Sivert sits there swell-

ing with pride at knowing better, but says never a word.

His father might just as well believe that Axel's pressing business in the town had been to buy machines; his mother too might think so for all that. Ho, but there was neither of them thought so in their hearts; they had heard whispers enough of what was the matter; of a new child-murder case in the wilds.

"Time for bed," says his father at last.

Sivert goes off to bed, swelling with knowledge. Axel had been summoned for examination; 'twas a big affair — the Lensmand had gone with him — so big indeed that the Lensmand's lady, who had just had another child, had left the baby and was gone in to town with her husband. She had promised to put in a word to the jury herself.

Gossip and scandal all abroad in the village now, and Sivert saw well enough that a certain earlier crime of the same sort was being called to mind again. Outside the church, the groups would stop talking as he came up, and had he not been the man he was, perhaps some would have turned away from him. Good to be Sivert those days, a man from a big place to begin with, son of a wealthy landowner — and then beside, to be known as a clever fellow, a good worker; he ranked before others, and was looked up to for himself. Sivert had always been well liked among folk. If only Jensine did not learn too much before they got home that day! And Sivert had his own affairs to think of — ay, folk in

the wilds can blush and pale as well as other. He had seen Jensine as she left the church with little Rebecca; she had seen him too, but went by. He waited a bit, and then drove over to the smith's to fetch them.

They were sitting at table, all the family at dinner. Sivert is asked to join them, but has had his dinner, thanks. They knew he would be coming, they might have waited that bit of a while for him — so they would have done at Sellanraa, but not here, it seemed.

"Nay, 'tis not what you're used to, I dare say," says the smith's wife. And, "What news from church?" says the smith, for all he had been at church himself.

When Jensine and little Rebecca were seated up in the cart again, says the smith's wife to her daughter: "Well, good-bye, Jensine; we'll be wanting you home again soon." And that could be taken two ways, thought Sivert, but he said nothing. If the speech had been more direct, more plain and outspoken, he might perhaps . . . He waits, with puckered brows, but no more is said.

They drive up homeward, and little Rebecca is the only one with a word to say; she is full of the wonder of going to church, the priest in his dress with a silver cross, and the lights and the organ music. After a long while Jensine says: "'Tis a shameful thing about Barbro and all."

"What did your mother mean about you coming home soon?" asked Sivert.

"What she meant?"

"Ay. You thinking of leaving us, then?"

"Why, they'll be wanting me home some time, I doubt," says she.

"*Ptro!*" says Sivert, stopping his horse. "Like me to drive back with you now, perhaps?"

Jensine looks at him; he is pale as death.

"No," says she. And a little after she begins to cry.

Rebecca looks in surprise from one to the other. Oh, but little Rebecca was a good one to have on a journey like that; she took Jensine's part and patted her and made her smile again. And when little Rebecca looked threateningly at her brother and said she was going to jump down and find a big stick to beat him, Sivert had to smile too.

"But what did *you* mean, now, I'd like to know?" says Jensine.

Sivert answered straight out at once: "I meant, if you don't care to stay with us, why, we must manage without."

And a long while after, said Jensine: "Well, there's Leopoldine, she's big now, and fit and all to do my work, seems."

Ay, 'twas a sorrowful journey.

Chapter VII

A MAN walks up the way through the hills. Wind and rain; the autumn downpour has begun, but the man cares little for that, he looks glad at heart, and glad he is. 'Tis Axel Ström, coming back from the town and the court and all — they have let him go free. Ay, a happy man — first of all, there's a mowing-machine and a harrow for him down at the quay, and more than that, he's free, and not guilty. Had taken no part in the killing of a child. Ay, so things can turn out!

But the times he had been through! Standing there as a witness, this toiler in the fields had known the hardest days of his life. 'Twas no gain to him to make Barbro's guilt seem greater, and for that reason he was careful not to say too much, he did not even say all he knew; every word had to be dragged out of him, and he answered mostly with but " Yes " and " No." Was it not enough? Was he to make more of it than there was already? Oh, but there were times when it looked serious indeed; there were the men of Law, black-robed and dangerous, easy enough for them, it seemed, just with a word or so, to turn the whole thing as they pleased, and have him sentenced. But they were kindly folk after all, and did not try to bring him to destruction.

Also, as it happened, there were powerful influences at work trying to save Barbro, and it was all to his advantage as well.

Then what on earth was there for him to trouble about?

Barbro herself would hardly try to make things look worse than need be for her former master and lover; he knew terrible things about this and an earlier affair of the same sort; she could not be such a fool. No, Barbro was clever enough; she said a good word for Axel, and declared that he had known nothing of her having borne a child till after it was all over. He was different in some ways, perhaps, from other men, and they did not always get on well together, but a quiet man, and a good man in every way. No, it was true he had dug a new grave and buried the body away there, but that was long after, and by reason he had thought the first place was not dry enough, though indeed it was, and 'twas only Axel's odd way of thinking.

What need, then, for Axel to fear at all when Barbro took all the blame on herself that way? And as for Barbro herself, there were mighty influences at work.

Fru Lensmand Heyerdahl had taken up the case. She went about to high and low, never sparing herself, demanded to be called as a witness, and made a speech in court. When her turn came, she stood there before them all and was a great lady indeed; she took up the question of infanticide in all its aspects, and gave the court a long harangue on the

subject — it almost seemed as if she had obtained permission beforehand to say what she pleased. Ay, folk might say what they would of Fru Lensmand Heyerdahl, but make a speech, that she could, and was learned in politics and social questions, no doubt about that. 'Twas a marvel where she found all her words. Now and again the presiding justice seemed wishful to keep her to the point, but maybe he had not the heart to interrupt, and let her run on. And at the end of it all, she volunteered one or two useful items of information, and made a startling offer to the court.

Leaving out all legal technicalities, what took place was this:

"We women," said Fru Heyerdahl, "we are an unfortunate and oppressed moiety of humanity. It is the men who make the laws, and we women have not a word to say in the matter. But can any man put himself in the position of a woman in childbirth? Has he ever felt the dread of it, ever known the terrible pangs, ever cried aloud in the anguish of that hour?

"In the present instance, it is a servant-girl who has borne the child. A girl, unmarried, and consequently trying all through the critical time to hide her condition. And why must she seek to hide it? Because of society. Society despises the unmarried woman who bears a child. Not only does society offer her no protection, but it persecutes her, pursues her with contempt and disgrace. Atrocious! No human creature with any heart at all could help feel-

ing indignant at such a state of things. Not only is the girl to bring a child into the world, a thing in itself surely hard enough, but she is to be treated as a criminal for that very fact. I will venture to say that it was well for the unfortunate girl now accused before the court that her child was born by accident when she fell into the water, and drowned. Well for herself and for the child. As long as society maintains its present attitude, an unmarried mother should be counted guiltless even if she does kill her child."

Here a slight murmur was heard from the presiding justice.

" Or at any rate, her punishment should be merely nominal," said Fru Heyerdahl. " We are all agreed, of course," she went on, " that infant life should be preserved, but is that to mean that no law of simple humanity is to apply to the unfortunate mother? Think, consider what she has been through during all the period of pregnancy, what suffering she has endured in striving to hide her condition, and all the time never knowing where to turn for herself and the child when it comes. No man can imagine it," said she. " The child is at least killed in kindness. The mother tries to save herself and the child she loves from the misery of its life. The shame is more than she can bear, and so the plan gradually forms itself in her mind, to put the child out of the way. The birth takes place in secret, and the mother is for four-and-twenty hours in such a delirious state that at the moment of killing the

child she is simply not responsible for her actions. Practically speaking, she has not herself committed the act at all, being out of her senses at the time. With every bone in her body aching still after her delivery, she has to take the little creature's life and hide away the body — think what an effort of will is demanded here! Naturally, we all wish all children to live; we are distressed at the thought that any should be exterminated in such a way. But it is the fault of society that it is so; the fault of a hopeless, merciless, scandalmongering, mischievous, and evil-minded society, ever on the watch to crush an unmarried mother by every means in its power!

"But — even after such treatment at the hands of society, the persecuted mother can rise up again. It often happens that these girls, after one false step of the sort, are led by that very fact to develop their best and noblest qualities. Let the court inquire of the superintendents at refuge homes, where unmarried mothers and their children are received, if this is not the case. And experience has shown that it is just such girls who have — whom society has forced to kill their own children, that make the best nurses. Surely that was a matter for any and all to think seriously about?

"Then there is another side of the question. Why is the man to go free? The mother found guilty of infanticide is thrust into prison and tortured, but the father, the seducer, he is never touched. Yet being as he is the cause of the child's existence, he is a party to the crime; his share in it,

indeed, is greater than the mother's; had it not been for him, there would have been no crime. Then why should he be acquitted? Because the laws are made by men. There is the answer. The enormity of such man-made laws cries of itself to Heaven for intervention. And there can be no help for us women till we are allowed a say in the elections, and in the making of laws, ourselves.

"But," said Fru Heyerdahl, "if this is the terrible fate that is meted out to the guilty — or, let us say, the more clearly guilty — unmarried mother who has killed her child, what of the innocent one who is merely suspected of the crime, and has not committed it? What reparation does society offer to her? None at all! I can testify that I know the girl here accused; have known her since she was a child; she has been in my service, and her father is my husband's assistant. We women venture to think and feel directly in opposition to men's accusations and persecution; we dare to have our own opinion. The girl there has been arrested, deprived of her liberty, on suspicion of having in the first place concealed the birth of a child, and further of having killed the child so born. I have no doubt in my own mind that she is not guilty of either — the court will itself arrive at this self-evident conclusion. Concealment of birth — the child was born in the middle of the day. True, the mother is alone at the time — but who could have been with her in any case? The place is far away in the wilds, the only living soul within reach is a man — how could she send

for a man at such a moment? Any woman will tell you it is impossible — not to be thought of. And then — it is alleged that she must have killed the child after. But the child was born in the water — the mother falls down in an icy stream, and the child is born. What was she doing by the water? She is a servant-girl, a slave, that is to say, and has her daily work to do; she is going to fetch juniper twigs for cleaning. And crossing the stream, she slips and falls in. And there she lies; the child is born, and is drowned in the water."

Fru Heyerdahl stopped. She could see from the look of the court and the spectators that she had spoken wonderfully well; there was a great silence in the place, only Barbro sat dabbing her eyes now and again for sheer emotion. And Fru Heyerdahl closed with these words: "We women have some heart, some feeling. I have left my own children in the care of strangers to travel all this way and appear as a witness on behalf of the unfortunate girl sitting there. Men's laws cannot prevent women from thinking; and I think this, that the girl there has been punished sufficiently for no crime. Acquit her, let her go free, and I will take charge of her myself. She will make the best nurse I have ever had."

And Fru Heyerdahl stepped down.

Says the justice then: "But I think you said a moment ago that the best nurses were those who *had* killed their children?"

Oh, but the justice was not of a mind to go against

Fru Heyerdahl, not in the least — he was as humane as could be himself, a man as gentle as a priest. When the advocate for the Crown put a few questions to the witness afterwards, the justice sat for the most part making notes on some papers.

The proceedings lasted only till a little over noon; there were few witnesses, and the case was clear enough. Axel Ström sat hoping for the best, then suddenly it seemed as if the advocate for the Crown and Fru Heyerdahl were joining forces to make things awkward for him, because he had buried the body instead of notifying the death. He was cross-examined somewhat sharply on this point, and would likely enough have come out badly if he had not all at once caught sight of Geissler sitting in the court. Ay, 'twas right enough, Geissler was there. This gave Axel courage, he no longer felt himself alone against the Law that was determined to beat him down. And Geissler nodded to him.

Ay, Geissler was come to town. He had not asked to be called as a witness, but he was there. He had also spent a couple of days before the case came on in going into the matter himself, and noting down what he remembered of Axel's own account given him at Maaneland. Most of the documents seemed to Geissler somewhat unsatisfactory; this Lensmand Heyerdahl was evidently a narrow-minded person, who had throughout endeavoured to prove complicity on Axel's part. Fool, idiot of a man — what did he know of life in the wilds, when he could see that the child was just what Axel had

counted on to keep the woman, his helpmeet, on the place!

Geissler spoke to the advocate for the Crown, but it seemed there was little need of intervention there; he wanted to help Axel back to his farm and his land, but Axel was in no need of help, from the looks of things. For the case was going well as far as Barbro herself was concerned, and if she were acquitted, then there could be no question of any complicity at all. It would depend on the testimony of the witnesses.

When the few witnesses had been heard — Oline had not been summoned, but only the Lensmand, Axel himself, the experts, a couple of girls from the village — when they had been heard, it was time to adjourn for the midday break, and Geissler went up to the advocate for the Crown once more. The advocate was of opinion that all was going well for the girl Barbro, and so much the better. Fru Lensmand Heyerdahl's words had carried great weight. All depended now upon the finding of the court.

"Are you at all interested in the girl?" asked the advocate.

"Why, to a certain extent," answered Geissler — "or rather, perhaps, in the man."

"Has she been in your service too?"

"No, he's never been in my service."

"I was speaking of the girl. It's she that has the sympathy of the court."

"No, she's never been in my service at all."

"The man — h'm, he doesn't seem to come out

of it so well," said the advocate. "Goes off and buries the body all by himself in the wood — looks bad, very bad."

"He wanted to have it buried properly, I suppose," said Geissler. "It hadn't been really buried at all at first."

"Well, of course a woman hadn't the strength of a man to go digging. And in her state — she must have been done up already. Altogether," said the advocate, "I think we've come to take a more humane view of these infanticide cases generally, of late. If I were to judge, I should never venture to condemn the girl at all; and from what has appeared in this case, I shall not venture to demand a conviction."

"Very pleased to hear it," said Geissler, with a bow.

The advocate went on: "As a man, as a private person, I will even go further, and say: I would never condemn a single unmarried mother for killing her child."

"Most interesting," said Geissler, "to find the advocate for the Crown so entirely in agreement with what Fru Heyerdahl said before the court."

"Oh, Fru Heyerdahl! . . . Still, to my mind, there was a great deal in what she said. After all, what is the good of all these convictions? Unmarried mothers have suffered enough beforehand, and been brought so low in every human regard by the brutal and callous attitude of the world — the punishment ought to suffice."

Geissler rose, and said at last: "No doubt. But what about the children?"

"True," said the advocate, "it's a sad business about the children. Still, all things considered, perhaps it's just as well. Illegitimate children have a hard time, and turn out badly as often as not."

Geissler felt perhaps some touch of malice at the portly complacency of the man of law; he said:

"Erasmus was born out of wedlock."

"Erasmus . . . ?"

"Erasmus of Rotterdam."

"H'm."

"And Leonardo the same."

"Leonardo da Vinci? Really? Well, of course, there are exceptions, otherwise there would be no rule. But on the whole . . ."

"We pass protective measures for beast and bird," said Geissler; "seems rather strange, doesn't it, not to trouble about our own young?"

The advocate for the Crown reached out slowly and with dignity after some papers on the table, as a hint that he had not time to continue the discussion. "Yes . . ." said he absently. "Yes, yes, no doubt. . . ."

Geissler expressed his thanks for a most instructive conversation, and took his leave.

He sat down in the court-house again, to be there in good time. He was not ill-pleased, maybe, to feel his power; he had knowledge of a certain piece of wrapping, a man's shirt cut across, to carry — let us say twigs for a broom; of the body of a child

floating in the harbour at Bergen — ay, he could make matters awkward for the court if he chose; a word from him would be as effective as a thousand swords. But Geissler had doubtless no intention of uttering that word now unless it were needed. Things were going splendidly without; even the advocate for the Crown had declared himself on the side of the accused.

The room fills, and the court is sitting again.

An interesting comedy to watch in a little town. The warning gravity of the advocate for the Crown, the emotional eloquence of the advocate for the defence. The court sat listening to what appeared to be its duty in regard to the case of a girl named Barbro, and the death of her child.

For all that, it was no light matter after all to decide. The advocate for the Crown was a presentable man to look at, and doubtless also a man of heart, but something appeared to have annoyed him recently or possibly he had suddenly remembered that he held a certain office in the State and was bound to act from that point of view. An incomprehensible thing, but he was plainly less disposed to be lenient now than he had been during the morning; if the crime had been committed, he said, it was a serious matter, and things would look black indeed if they could with certainty be declared so black as would appear from the testimony of the witnesses already heard. That was a matter for the court to decide. He wished to draw attention to three points: firstly, whether they had before them a con-

cealment of birth; whether this was clear to the court. He made some personal remarks on this head. The second point was the wrapping, the piece of a shirt — why had the accused taken this with her? Was it in order to make use of it for a certain purpose preconceived? He developed this suggestion further. His third point was the hurried and suspicious burial, without any notification of the death to either priest or Lensmand. Here, the man was the person chiefly responsible, and it was of the utmost importance that the court should come to the right conclusion in that respect. For it was obvious that if the man were an accomplice, and had therefore undertaken the burial himself, then his servant-girl must have committed a crime before he could be an accomplice in it.

" H'm," from some one in court.

Axel Ström felt himself again in danger. He looked up without meeting a single glance; all eyes were fixed on the advocate speaking. But far down in the court sat Geissler again, looking highly supercilious, as if bursting with his own superiority, his under-lip thrust forward, his face turned towards the ceiling. This enormous indifference to the solemnity of the court, and that " H'm," uttered loudly and without concealment, cheered Axel mightily; he felt himself no longer alone against the world.

And now things took a turn again for the better. This advocate for the Crown seemed at last to think he had done enough, had achieved all that was possible in the way of directing suspicion and ill-feel-

ing towards the man; and now he stopped. He did more; he almost, as it were, faced round, and made no demand for a conviction. He ended by saying, in so many words, that after the testimony of the witnesses in the case, he on his part did not call upon the court to convict the accused.

This was well enough, thought Axel — the business was practically over.

Then came the turn of the advocate for the defence, a young man who had studied the law, and had now been entrusted with this most satisfactory case. His tone itself showed the view he took of it; never had a man been more certain of defending an innocent person than he. Truth to tell, this Fru Heyerdahl had taken the wind out of his sails beforehand, and used several of his own intended arguments that morning; he was annoyed at her having already exploited the "society" theme — oh, but he could have said some first-rate things about society himself. He was incensed at the mistaken leniency of the presiding justice in not stopping her speech; it was a defence in itself, a brief prepared beforehand — and what was there left for him?

He began at the beginning of the life-story of the girl Barbro. Her people were not well off, albeit industrious and respectable; she had gone out to service at an early age, first of all to the Lensmand's. The court had heard that morning what her mistress, Fru Heyerdahl, thought of her — no one could wish for a finer recommendation. Barbro had then gone to Bergen. Here the advocate laid great

stress on a most feelingly written testimonial from two young business men in whose employ Barbro had been while at Bergen— evidently in a position of trust. Barbro had come back to act as housekeeper for this unmarried man in an outlying district. And here her trouble began.

She found herself with child by this man. The learned counsel for the prosecution had already referred — in the most delicate and considerate manner, be it said — to the question of concealment of birth. Had Barbro attempted to conceal her condition; had she denied being with child? The two witnesses, girls from her own village, had been of opinion that she was in that condition; but when they had asked her, she had not denied it at all, she had merely passed the matter off. What would a young girl naturally do in such a case but pass it off? No one else had asked her about it at all. Go to her mistress and confess? She had no mistress; she was mistress on the place herself. She had a master, certainly, but a girl could not be expected to confide in a man upon such a matter; she bears her cross herself; does not sing, does not whisper, but is silent as a Trappist. Concealment? No, but she kept herself to herself.

The child is born — a sound and healthy boy; had lived and breathed after birth, but had been suffocated. The court had been made aware of the circumstances attending this birth: it had taken place in the water; the mother falls into the stream, and

the child is born, but she is incapable of saving the child. She lies there, unable even to rise herself till some time after. No marks of violence were to be seen upon the body; there was nothing to indicate that it had been intentionally killed; it had been drowned by misadventure at birth, that was all. The most natural explanation in the world.

His learned colleague had made some mention of a cloth or wrapping, considering it something of a mystery why she should have taken half a shirt with her that day. The mystery was clear enough; she had taken the shirt to carry stripped juniper in. She might have taken — let us say, a pillow-case; as it was, she had taken this piece of a shirt. Something she must have, in any case; she could not carry the stuff back in her hands. No, there was surely no ground for making a mystery of this.

One point, however, was not quite so clear: had the accused been treated with the care and consideration which her condition at the time demanded? Had her master dealt kindly with her? It would be as well for him if it were found so. The girl herself had, under cross-examination, referred to the man in satisfactory terms; and this again was evidence in itself of her own nobility of character. The man, on his part, Axel Ström, had likewise in his depositions refrained from any attempt to add to the burden of the girl, or to blame her in any way. In this he had acted rightly — not to say wisely, seeing that his own case depended very largely upon

how matters went with her. By laying the blame on her he would, if she were convicted, bring about his own downfall.

It was impossible to consider the documents and depositions in the present case without feeling the deepest sympathy for this young girl in her forsaken situation. And yet there was no need to appeal to mercy on her behalf, only to justice and human understanding. She and her master were in a way betrothed, but a certain dissimilarity of temperament and interests prevented them from marrying. The girl could not entrust her future to such a man. It was not a pleasant subject, but it might be well to return for a moment to the question of the wrapping that had been spoken of before; it should here be noted that the girl had taken, not one of her own undergarments, but one of her master's shirts. The question at once arose: had the man himself offered the material for the purpose? Here, one was at first inclined to see a possibility, at any rate, that the man, Axel, had had some part in the affair.

"H'm," from some one in court. Loud and hard — so much so, indeed, that the speaker paused, and all looked round to see who might be responsible for the interruption. The presiding justice frowned.

But, went on the advocate for the defence, collecting himself again, in this respect, also, we can set our minds at rest, thanks to the accused herself. It might seem well to her advantage to divide the blame here, but she had not attempted to do so.

She had entirely and without reserve absolved Axel Ström from any complicity whatever in the fact of her having taken his shirt instead of something of her own on her way to the water — that is, on her way to the woods to gather juniper. There was not the slightest reason for doubting the asseveration of the accused on this point; her depositions had throughout been found in accordance with the facts, and the same was evidently the case in this. Had the shirt been given her by the man, this would have been to presuppose a killing of the child already planned — the accused, truthful as she was, had not attempted to charge even this man with a crime that had never been committed. Her demeanour throughout had been commendably frank and open; she had made no endeavour to throw the blame on others. There were frequent instances before the court of this delicacy of feeling on the part of the accused, as, for instance, the fact that she had wrapped up the body of the child as well as she could, and put it away decently, as the Lensmand had found it.

Here the presiding justice interposed, merely as a matter of form, observing that it was grave No. 2 which the Lensmand had found — the grave in which Axel had buried the body after its removal from the first.

"True, that is true. I stand corrected," said the advocate, with all proper respect for the president of the court. Perfectly true. But — Axel had himself stated that he had only carried the body

from one grave and laid it in the other. And there could be no doubt but that a woman was better able to wrap up a child than was a man — and who best of all? Surely a mother's tender hand?

The presiding justice nods.

In any case — could not this girl — if she had been of another sort — have buried the child naked? One might even go so far as to say that she might have thrown it into a dustbin. She might have left it out under a tree in the open, to freeze to death — that is to say, of course, if it had not been dead already. She might have put it in the oven when left alone, and burnt it up. She might have taken it up to the river at Sellanraa and thrown it in there. But this mother did none of these things; she wrapped the dead child neatly in a cloth and buried it. And if the body had been found wrapped neatly when the grave was opened, it must be a woman and not a man who had so wrapped it.

And now, the advocate for the defence went on, it lay with the court to determine what measure of guilt could properly be attributed to the girl Barbro in the matter. There was but little remaining for which she could be blamed at all — indeed, in his, counsel's, opinion, there was nothing. Unless the court found reason to convict on the charge of having failed to notify the death. But here, again — the child was dead, and nothing could alter that; the place was far out in the wilds, many miles from either priest or Lensmand; natural enough, surely, to let it sleep the eternal sleep in a neat grave in the

woods. And if it were a crime to have buried it thus, then the accused was not more guilty than the father of the child — as it was, the misdemeanour was surely slight enough to be overlooked. Modern practice was growing more and more disposed to lay more stress on reforming the criminal than on punishing the crime. It was an antiquated system which sought to inflict punishment for every mortal thing — it was the *lex talionis* of the Old Testament, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. There was no longer the spirit of the law in modern times. The law of the present day was more humane, seeking to adjust itself according to the degree of criminal intent and purpose displayed in each case.

No! The court could never convict this girl. It was not the object of a trial to secure an addition to the number of criminals, but rather to restore to society a good and useful member. It should be noted that the accused had now the prospect of a new position where she would be under the best possible supervision. Fru Lensmand Heyerdahl had, from her intimate knowledge of the girl, and from her own valuable experience as a mother, thrown wide the doors of her own home to the girl; the court would bear in mind the weight of responsibility attaching to its decision here, and would then convict or acquit the accused. Finally, he wished to express his thanks to the learned counsel for the prosecution, who had generously refrained from demanding a conviction — a pleasing evidence of deep and humane understanding.

The advocate for the defence sat down.

The remainder of the proceedings did not take long. The summing up was but a repetition of the same points, as viewed from opposite sides, a brief synopsis of the action of the play, dry, dull, and dignified. It had all been managed very satisfactorily all round; both the advocates had pointed out what the court should consider, and the presiding justice found his task easy enough.

Lights were lit, a couple of lamps hanging from the ceiling — a miserable light it was, the justice could hardly see to read his notes. He mentioned with some severity the point that the child's death had not been duly notified to the proper authorities — but that, under the circumstances, should be considered rather the duty of the father than of the mother, owing to her weakness at the time. The court had then to determine whether any case had been proved with regard to concealment of birth and infanticide. Here the evidence was again recapitulated from beginning to end. Then came the usual injunction as to being duly conscious of responsibility, which the court had heard before, and finally, the not uncommon reminder that in cases of doubt, the scale should be allowed to turn in favour of the accused.

And now all was clear and ready.

The judges left the room and went into another apartment. They were to consider a paper with certain questions, which one of them had with him.

They were away five minutes, and returned with a "No" to all the questions.

No, the girl Barbro had not killed her child.

Then the presiding judge said a few more words, and declared that the girl Barbro was now free.

The court-house emptied, the comedy was over. . . .

Someone takes Axel Ström by the arm: it is Geissler. "H'm," said he, "so you're done with that now!"

"Ay," said Axel.

"But they've wasted a lot of your time to no purpose."

"Ay," said Axel again. But he was coming to himself again gradually, and after a moment he added: "None the less, I'm glad it was no worse."

"No worse?" said Geissler. "I'd have liked to see them try!" He spoke with emphasis, and Axel fancied Geissler must have had something to do with the case himself; that he had intervened. Heaven knows if, after all, it had not been Geissler himself that had led the whole proceedings and gained the result he wished. It was a mystery, anyway.

So much at least Axel understood, that Geissler had been on his side all through.

"I've a deal to thank you for," said he, offering his hand.

"What for?" asked Geissler.

"Why, for — for all this."

Geissler turned it off shortly. "I've done noth-

ing at all. Didn't trouble to do anything — 'twasn't worth while." But for all that, Geissler was not displeased, maybe, at being thanked; it was as if he had been waiting for it, and now it had come. "I've no time to stand talking now," he said. "Going back tomorrow, are you? Good. Good-bye, then, and good luck to you." And Geissler strolled off across the street.

On the boat going home, Axel encountered the Lensmand and his wife, Barbro and the two girls called as witnesses.

"Well," said Fru Heyerdahl, "aren't you glad it turned out so well?"

Axel said, "Yes"; he was glad it had come out all right in the end.

The Lensmand himself put in a word, and said: "This is the second of these cases I've had while I've been here — first with Inger from Sellanraa, and now this. No, it's no good trying to countenance that sort of thing — justice must take its course."

But Fru Heyerdahl guessed, no doubt, that Axel was not over pleased with her speech of the day before, and tried to smooth it over, to make up for it somehow now. "You understood, of course, why I had to say all that about you yesterday?"

"H'm — ye — es," said Axel.

"You understood, of course, I know. You didn't think I wanted to make things harder for you in any

way. I've always thought well of you, and I don't mind saying so."

"Ay," said Axel, no more. But he was pleased and touched at her words.

"Yes, I mean it," said Fru Heyerdahl. "But I was obliged to try and shift the blame a little your way, otherwise Barbro would have been convicted, and you too. It was all for the best, indeed it was."

"I thank you kindly," said Axel.

"And it was I and no other that went about from one to another through the place, trying to do what I could for you both. And you saw, of course, that we all had to do the same thing — make out that you were partly to blame, so as to get you both off in the end."

"Ay," said Axel.

"Surely you didn't imagine for a moment that I meant any harm to you? When I've always thought so well of you!"

Ay, this was good to hear after all the disgrace of it. Axel, at any rate, was so touched that he felt he must do something, give Fru Heyerdahl something or other, whatever he could find — a piece of meat perhaps, now autumn was come. He had a young bull . . .

Fru Lensmand Heyerdahl kept her word; she took Barbro to live with her. On board the steamer, too, she looked after the girl, and saw that she was not cold, nor hungry; took care, also, that she did not get up to any nonsense with the

mate from Bergen. The first time it occurred, she said nothing, but simply called Barbro to her. But a little while after there was Barbro with him again, her head on one side, talking Bergen dialect and smiling. Then her mistress called her up and said: "Really, Barbro, you ought not to be going on like that among the men now. Remember what you've just been through, and what you've come from."

"I was only talking to him a minute," said Barbro. "I could hear he was from Bergen."

Axel did not speak to her. He noticed that she was pale and clear-skinned now, and her teeth were better. She did not wear either of his rings. . . .

And now here is Axel tramping up to his own place once more. Wind and rain, but he is glad at heart; a mowing-machine and a harrow down at the quay; he had seen them. Oh, that Geissler! Never a word had he said in town about what he had sent. Ay, an unfathomable man was Geissler.

Chapter VIII

AXEL had no long time to rest at home, as it turned out; the autumn gales led to fresh trouble and bothersome work that he had brought upon himself: the telegraph apparatus on his wall announced that the line was out of order.

Oh, but he had been thinking overmuch of the money, surely, when he took on that post. It had been a nuisance from the start. Brede Olsen had fairly threatened him when he went down to fetch the apparatus and tools; ay, had said to him in as many words: "You don't seem like remembering how I saved your life last winter!"

"'Twas Oline saved my life," answered Axel.

"Ho, indeed! And didn't I carry you down myself on my own poor shoulders? Anyway, you were clever enough to buy up my place in summer-time and leave me homeless in the winter." Ay, Brede was deeply offended; he went on:

"But you can take the telegraph for me, ay, all the rubble of it for me. I and mine we'll go down to the village and start on something there — you don't know what it'll be, but wait and see. What about a hotel place where folk can get coffee? You see but we'll manage all right. There's my wife can sell things to eat and drink as well as another, and I can go out on business and make a heap more than

you ever did. But I don't mind telling you, Axel, I could make things awkward for you in many odd ways, seeing all I know about the telegraph and things; ay, 'twould be easy enough both to pull down poles and cut the line and all. And then you to go running out after it midway in the busy time. That's all I'll say to you, Axel, and you bear it in mind. . . ."

Now Axel should have been down and brought up the machines from the quay — all over gilt and colouring they were, like pictures to see. And he might have had them to look at all that day, and learn the manner of using them — but now they must wait. 'Twas none so pleasant to have to put aside all manner of necessary work to run and see after a telegraph line. But 'twas the money. . . .

Up on the top of the hill he meets Aronsen. Ay, Aronsen the trader standing there looking and gazing out into the storm, like a vision himself. What did he want there? No peace in his mind now, it seems, but he must go up the fjeld himself and look at the mine with his own eyes. And this, look you, Trader Aronsen had done from sheer earnest thought of his own and his family's future. Here he is, face to face with bare desolation on the forsaken hills, machines lying there to rust, carts and material of all sorts left out in the open —'twas dismal to see. Here and there on the walls of the huts were placards, notices written by hand, forbidding any one to damage or remove the company's property — tools, carts, or buildings.

Axel stops for a few words with the mad trader, and asks if he has come out shooting.

"Shooting? Ay, if I could only get within reach of him!"

"Him? Who, then?"

"Why, him that's ruining me and all the rest of us hereabout. Him that won't sell his bit of fjeld and let things get to work again, and trade and money passing same as before."

"D'you mean him Geissler, then?"

"Ay, 'tis him I mean. Ought to be shot!"

Axel laughs at this, and says: "Geissler he was in town but a few days back; you should have talked to him there. But if I might be so bold as to say, I doubt you'd better leave him alone, after all."

"And why?" asks Aron angrily.

"Why? I've a mind he'd be overwise and mysterious for you in the end."

They argued over this for a while, and Aronsen grew more excited than ever. At last Axel asked jestingly: "Well, anyway, you'll not be so hard on us all to run away and leave us to ourselves in the wilds?"

"Huh! Think I'm going to stay fooling about here in your bogs and never so much as making the price of a pipe?" cried Aron indignantly. "Find me a buyer and I'll sell out."

"Sell out?" says Axel. "The land's good ordinary land if she's handled as should be — and what you've got's enough to keep a man."

"Haven't I just said I'll not touch it?" cried

Aronsen again in the gale. "I can do better than that!"

Axel thought if that was so, 'twould be easy to find a buyer; but Aronsen laughed scornfully at the idea — there was nobody there in the wilds had money to buy him out.

"Not here in the wilds, maybe, but elsewhere."

"Here's naught but filth and poverty," said Aron bitterly.

"Why, that's as it may be," said Axel in some offence. "But Isak up at Sellanraa he could buy you out any day."

"Don't believe it," said Aronsen.

"'Tis all one to me what you believe," said Axel, and turned to go.

Aronsen called after him: "Hi, wait a bit! What's that you say — Isak might take the place, was that what you said?"

"Ay," said Axel, "if 'twas only the money. He's means enough to buy up five of your Storborg and all!"

Aronsen had gone round keeping wide of Sellanraa on his way up, taking care not to be seen; but, going back, he called in and had a talk with Isak. But Isak only shook his head and said nay, 'twas a matter he'd never thought of, and didn't care to.

But when Eleseus came back home that Christmas, Isak was easier to deal with. True, he maintained that it was a mad idea to think of buying Storborg, 'twas nothing had ever been in his mind; still, if

Eleseus thought he could do anything with the place, why, they might think it over.

Eleseus himself was midways between, as it were; not exactly eager for it, yet not altogether indifferent. If he did settle down here at home, then his career in one way was at an end. 'Twas not like being in a town. That autumn, when a lot of people from his parts had been up for cross-examination in a certain place, he had taken care not to show himself; he had no desire to meet any that knew him from that quarter; they belonged to another world. And was he now to go back to that same world himself?

His mother was all for buying the place; Sivert, too, said it would be best. They stuck to Eleseus both of them, and one day the three drove down to Storborg to see the wonder with their own eyes.

But once there was a prospect of selling, Aronsen became a different man; he wasn't pressed to get rid of it, not at all. If he did go away, the place could stand as it was; 'twas a first-rate holding, a "cash down" place, there'd be no difficulty in selling it any time. "You'd not give my price," said Aronsen.

They went over the house and stores, the warehouse and sheds, inspected the miserable remains of the stock, consisting of a few mouth-organs, watch-chains, boxes of coloured papers, lamps with hanging ornaments, all utterly unsaleable to sensible folks that lived on their land. There were a few cases of nails and some cotton print, and that was all.

Eleseus was constrained to show off a bit, and looked over things with a knowing air. "I've no use for that sort of truck," said he.

"Why, then, you've no call to buy it," said Aronsen.

"Anyhow, I'll offer you fifteen hundred *Kroner* for the place as it stands, with goods, live stock, and the rest," said Eleseus. Oh, he was careless enough; his offer was but a show, for something to say.

And they drove back home. No, there was no deal; Eleseus had made a ridiculous offer, that Aronsen regarded as an insult. "I don't think much of you, young man," said Aronsen; ay, calling him young man, considering him but a slip of a lad that had grown conceited in the town, and thought to teach him, Aronsen, the value of goods.

"I'll not be called 'young man' by you, if you please," said Eleseus, offended in his turn. They must be mortal enemies after that.

But how could it be that Aronsen had all along been so independent and so sure of not being forced to sell? There was a reason for it: Aronsen had a little hope at the back of his mind, after all.

A meeting had been held in the village to consider the position which had arisen owing to Geissler's refusal to sell his part of the mining tract. 'Twas not only the outlying settlers who stood to lose by this, it would be fatal to the whole district.

Why could not folk go on living as well or as poorly now as before there had been any mine at

all? Well, they could not, and that was all about it. They had grown accustomed to better food, finer bread, store-bought clothes and higher wages, general extravagance — ay, folk had learned to reckon with money more, that was the matter. And now the money was gone again, had slipped away like a shoal of herring out to sea —'twas dire distress for them all, and what was to be done?

There was no doubt about it: ex-Lensmand Geissler was taking his revenge upon the village because they had helped his superior to get him dismissed; equally clear was it that they had underestimated him at the time. He had not simply disappeared and left. By the simplest means, merely by demanding an unreasonable price for a mine, he had succeeded in checking the entire development of the district. Ay, a strong man! Axel Ström from Maaneland could bear them out in this; he was the one who had last met Geissler. Brede's girl Barbro had had a lawsuit in the town, and come home acquitted; but Geissler, he had been there in court all the time. And if any one suggested that Geissler was dejected, and a broken man, why, he had only to look at the costly machines that same Geissler had sent up as a present to Axel Ström.

This man it was then, who held the fate of the district in his hand; they would have to come to some agreement with him. What price would Geissler ultimately be disposed to accept for his mine? They must ascertain in any case. The Swedes had offered him twenty-five thousand — Geissler had re-

fused. But suppose the village here, the commune, were to make up the remainder, simply to get things going again? If it were not an altogether unheard-of amount, it might be worth while. Both the trader at the shore station and Aronsen up at Storborg would be willing to contribute privately and secretly; funds devoted to such a purpose now would be repaid in the long run.

The end of it was that two men were deputed to call on Geissler and take up the matter with him. And they were expected back shortly.

So it was, then, that Aronsen cherished a flicker of hope, and thought he could afford to stand on his dignity with any who offered to buy up Storborg. But it was not to last.

A week later the deputation returned home with a flat refusal. Oh, they had done the worst thing possible at the outset, in choosing Brede Olsen as one of the men they sent — they had taken him as being one who best could spare the time. They had found Geissler, but he had only shaken his head and laughed. "Go back home again," he had said. But Geissler had paid for their journey back.

Then the district was to be left to its fate?

After Aronsen had raged for a while, and grown more and more desperate, he went up one day to Sellanraa and closed the deal. Ay, Aronsen did. Eleseus got it for the price he had offered; land and house and sheds, live stock and goods, for fifteen hundred *Kroner*. True, on going through the inventory after, it was found that Aronsen's wife had

converted most of the cotton print to her own use; but trifles of that sort were nothing to a man like Eleseus. It didn't do to be mean, he said.

Nevertheless, Eleseus was not exactly delighted with things as they had turned out — his future was settled now, he was to bury himself in the wilds. He must give up his great plans; he was no longer a young gentleman in an office, he would never be a Lensmand, not even live in a town at all. To his father and those at home he made it appear that he was proud at having secured Storborg at the very price he had fixed — it would show them he knew what he was about. But that small triumph did not go very far. He had also the satisfaction of taking over Andresen, the chief clerk, who was thus, as it were, included in the bargain. Aronsen had no longer any use for him, until he had a new place going. It was a pleasant sensation to be Eleseus, when Andresen came up begging to be allowed to stay; here it was Eleseus who was master and head of the business — for the first time in his life.

"You can stay, yes," he said. "I shall be wanting an assistant to look after the place when I'm away on business — opening up connections in Bergen and Trondhjem," said he.

And Andresen was no bad man to have, as it soon proved; he was a good worker, and looked after things well when Eleseus was away. 'Twas only at first he had been somewhat inclined to show and play the fine gentleman, and that was the fault of his master Aronsen. It was different now. In the

spring, when the bogs were thawed some depth, Sivert came down from Sellanraa to Storborg, to start a bit of ditching for his brother, and lo, Andresen himself went out on the land digging too. Heaven knows what possessed him to do it, for 'twas no work of his, but that was the sort of man he was. It was not thawed deep enough yet, and they could not get as far as they wanted by a long way, but it was something done, at any rate. It was Isak's old idea to drain the bogs at Storborg and till the land there properly; the bit of a store was only to be an extra, a convenience, to save folk going all the way down to the village for a reel of thread.

So Sivert and Andresen stood there digging, and talking now and again when they stopped for a rest. Andresen had also somehow or other managed to get hold of a gold piece, a twenty-*Krone* piece, and Sivert would gladly have had the bright thing himself; but Andresen would not part with it — kept it wrapped up in tissue paper in his chest. Sivert proposed a wrestling match for the money — see who could throw the other; but Andresen would not risk it. Sivert offered to stake twenty *Kroner* in notes against the gold piece, and do all the digging himself into the bargain if he won; but Andresen took offence at that. "Ho," said he, "and you'd like to go back home, no doubt, and say I'm no good at working on the land!" At last they agreed to set twenty-five *Kroner* in notes against the gold twenty-*Krone* piece, and Sivert slipped home to Sellanraa that night to ask his father for the money.

A young man's trick, the pretty play of youth! A night's sleep thrown away, to walk miles up and miles down again, and work next day as usual — 'twas nothing to a young man in his strength, and a bright gold piece was worth it all. Andresen was a little inclined to make fun of him over the deal, but Sivert was not at a loss; he had only to let fall a word of Leopoldine. "There! I was nearly forgetting. Leopoldine she asked after you. . . ." And Andresen stopped his work of a sudden and went very red.

Pleasant days for them both, draining and ditching, getting up long arguments for fun, and working, and arguing again. Now and then Eleseus would come out and lend a hand, but he soon tired. Eleseus was not strong either of body or will, but a thorough good fellow for all that. . . .

"Here's that Oline coming along," Sivert the jester would say. "Now you'll have to go in and sell her a paper of coffee." And Eleseus was glad enough to go. Selling Oline some trifle or other meant so many minutes' rest from throwing heavy clods.

And Oline, poor creature, she might well be needing a pinch of coffee now and again, whether by chance she managed to get the money from Axel to pay for it, or bartered a goats' milk cheese in exchange. Oline was not altogether what she had been; the work at Maaneland was too hard for her; she was an old woman now, and it was leaving its mark. Not that she ever confessed to any weak-

ness or ageing herself; ho! she would have found plenty to say if she had been dismissed. Tough and irrepressible was Oline; did her work, and found time to wander over to neighbours here or there for a real good gossip. 'Twas her plain right, and there was little gossiping at Maaneland. Axel himself was not given that way.

As for that Barbro case, Oline was displeased, ay, disappointed was Oline. Both of them acquitted! That Brede's girl Barbro should be let off when Inger Sellanraa had got eight years was not to Oline's taste at all; she felt an unchristian annoyance at such favouritism. But the Almighty would look to things, no doubt, in His own good time! And Oline nodded, as if prophesying divine retribution at a later date. Naturally, also, Oline made no secret of her dissatisfaction with the finding of the court, more especially when she happened to fall out with her master, Axel, over any little trifle. Then she would deliver herself, in the old soft-spoken way, of much deep and bitter sarcasm. "Ay, 'tis strange how the law's changed these days, for all the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah; but the word of the Lord's my guide, as ever was, and a blessed refuge for the meek."

Oh, Axel was sick and tired of his housekeeper now, and wished her anywhere. And now with spring coming again, and all the season's work to do alone; haymaking to come, and what was he to do? 'Twas a poor look-out. His brother's wife at Breidablik had written home to Helgeland trying to

find a decent woman to help him, but nothing had come of it as yet. And in any case, it would mean his having to pay for the journey.

Nay, 'twas a mean and wicked trick of Barbro to make away with the bit of a child and then run off herself. A summer and two winters now he had been forced to make do with Oline, and no saying how much longer it might be yet. And Barbro, the creature, did she care? He had had a few words with her down in the village one day that winter, but never a tear had trickled slowly from her eyes to freeze on her cheek.

"What you've done with rings I gave you?" asks he.

"Rings?"

"Ay, the rings."

"I haven't got them now."

"Ho, so you haven't got them now?"

"'Twas all over between us," said she. "And I couldn't wear them after that. 'Tis not the way to go on wearing rings when it's all over between you."

"Well, I'd just like to know what you've done with them, that's all."

"Wanted me to give them back, maybe," said she. "Well, I never thought you'd have had me put you to that shame."

Axel thought for a moment, and said: "I could have made it up to you other ways. That you shouldn't lose by it, I mean."

But no, Barbro had got rid of the rings, and never so much as gave him the chance of buying back a

gold ring and a silver ring at a reasonable price.

For all that, Barbro was not so thoroughly harsh and unlovable, that she was not. She had a long apron thing that fastened over the shoulders and with tucks at the edge, and a strip of white stuff up round her neck — ay, she looked well. There were some said she'd found a lad already down in the village to go sweethearting with, though maybe 'twas but their talk, after all. Fru Heyerdahl kept a watchful eye on her at any rate, and took care not to let her go to the Christmas dances.

Ay, Fru Heyerdahl was careful enough, that she was; here was Axel standing talking to his former servant-girl about a matter of two rings, and suddenly Fru Heyerdahl comes right between them and says: "Barbro, I thought you were going to the store?" Off goes Barbro. And her mistress turns to Axel and says: "Have you come down with some meat, or something?"

"H'm," said Axel, just that, and touched his cap.

Now it was Fru Heyerdahl that had praised him up so that last autumn, saying he was a splendid fellow and she had always thought well of him; and one good turn was worth another, no doubt. Axel knew the way of doing things; 'twas an old story, when simple folk had dealing with their betters, with authority. And he had thought at once of a piece of butcher's meat, a bull he had, that might be useful there. But time went on, and month and month passed by and autumn was gone, and the bull was never killed. And what harm could it do, after all,

if he kept it for himself? — give it away, and he would be so much poorer. And 'twas a fine beast, anyway.

"H'm, *Goddag*. Nay," said Axel, shaking his head; he'd no meat with him today.

But Fru Heyerdahl seemed to be guessing his thoughts, for she said: "I've heard you've an ox, or what?"

"Ay, so I have," said Axel.

"Are you going to keep it?"

"Ay, I'll be keeping him yet."

"I see. You've no sheep to be killed?"

"Not now I haven't. 'Tis this way, I've never had but what's to be kept on the place."

"Oh, I see," said Fru Heyerdahl; "well, that was all." And she went on her way.

Axel drove up homeward, but he could not help thinking somewhat of what had passed; he rather feared he had made a false step somehow. The Lensmand's lady had been an important witness once; for and against him, but important anyway. He had been through an unpleasant time on that occasion, but, after all, he had got out of it in the end — got out of a very awkward business in connection with the body of a child found buried on his land. Perhaps, after all, he had better kill that sheep.

And, strangely enough, this thought was somehow connected with Barbro. If he came down bringing sheep for her mistress it could hardly fail to make a certain impression on Barbro herself.

But again the days went on, and nothing evil hap-

pened for their going on. Next time he drove down to the village he had no sheep on his cart, no, still no sheep. But at the last moment he had taken a lamb. A big lamb, though; not a miserable little one by any means, and he delivered it with these words:

" 'Tis rare tough meat on a wether, and no sort of a gift to bring. But this is none so bad."

But Fru Heyerdahl would not hear of taking it as a gift. " Say what you want for it," she said. Oh, a fine lady, 'twas not her way to take gifts from folk! And the end of it was that Axel got a good price for his lamb.

He saw nothing of Barbro at all. Lensmand's lady had seen him coming, and got her out of the way. And good luck go with her — Barbro that had cheated him out of his help for a year and a half!

Chapter IX

THAT spring something unexpected happened — something of importance indeed; work at the mine was started again; Geissler had sold his land. Inconceivable! Oh, but Geissler was an unfathomable mind; he could make a bargain or refuse, shake his head for a "No," or nod the same for "Yes." Could make the whole village smile again.

Conscience had pricked him, maybe; he had no longer the heart to see the district where he had been Lensmand famishing on home-made gruel and short of money. Or had he got his quarter of a million? Possibly, again, Geissler himself had at last begun to feel the need of money, and had been forced to sell for what he could get. Twenty-five or fifty thousand was not to be despised, after all. As a matter of fact, there were rumours that it was his eldest son who had settled the business on his father's account.

Be that as it might, work was recommenced; the same engineer came again with his gangs of men, and the work went on anew. The same work, ay, but in a different fashion now, going backwards, as it were.

All seemed in regular order: the Swedish mine-owners had brought their men, and dynamite and

money — what could be wrong, anyway? Even Aronsen came back again, Aronsen the trader, who had set his mind on buying back Storborg from Eleseus.

"No," said Eleseus. "It's not for sale."

"You'll sell, I suppose, if you're offered enough?"

"No."

No, Eleseus was not going to sell Storborg. The truth was, he had changed his mind somewhat as to the position; it was none so bad, after all, to be owner of a trading station in the hills; he had a fine verandah with coloured glass windows, and a chief clerk to do all the work, while he himself went about the country travelling. Ay, travelling first class, with fine folks. One day, perhaps, he might be able to go as far as America — he often thought of that. Even these little journeys on business to the towns down in the south were something to live on for a long time after. Not that he let himself go altogether, and chartered a steamer of his own and held wild orgies on the way — orgies were not in his line. A strange fellow, was Eleseus; he no longer cared about girls, had given up such things altogether, lost all interest in them. No, but after all, he was the Margrave's son, and travelled first class and bought up loads of goods. And each time he came back a little finer than before, a greater man; the last time, he even wore galoshes to keep his feet dry. "What's that — you taken to wearing two pairs of shoes?" they said.

"I've been suffering from chilblains lately," says Eleseus.

And every one sympathized with Eleseus and his chilblains.

Glorious days — a grand life, with no end of leisure. No, he was not going to sell Storborg. What, go back to a little town and stand behind the counter in a little shop, and no chief clerk of his own at all? Moreover, he had made up his mind now to develop the business on a grand scale. The Swedes had come back again and would flood the place with money; he would be a fool to sell out now. Aronsen was forced to go back each time with a flat refusal, more and more disgusted at his own lack of foresight in ever having given up the place.

Oh, but Aronsen might have saved himself a deal of self-reproach, and likewise Eleseus with his plans and intentions, that he might have kept in moderation. And more than all, the village would have done well to be less confident, instead of going about smiling and rubbing its hands like angels sure of being blessed — no call for them to do so if they had but known. For now came disappointment, and no little one at that. Who would ever have thought it; work at the mine commenced again, true enough — but at the other end of the fjeld, eight miles away, on the southern boundary of Geissler's holding, far off in another district altogether, a district with which they were in no way concerned. And from there the work was to make its way gradually northward to the original mine, Isak's mine, to be a bless-

ing to folk in the wilds and in the village. At best, it would take years, any number of years, a generation.

The news came like a dynamite charge of the heaviest sort, with shock and stopping of ears. The village folk were overcome with grief. Some blamed Geissler; 'twas Geissler, that devil of a man, who had tricked them once more. Others huddled together at a meeting and sent out a new deputation of trusty men, this time to the mining company, to the engineer. But nothing came of it; the engineer explained that he was obliged to start work from the south because that was nearest the sea, and saved the need of an aerial railway, reduced the transport almost to nil. No, the work must begin that way: no more to be said.

Then it was that Aronsen at once rose up and set out for the new workings, the new promised land. He even tried to get Andresen to go with him: "What's the sense of you staying on here in the wilds?" said he. "Much better come with me." But Andresen would not leave; incomprehensible, but so it was, there was something which held him to the spot; he seemed to thrive there, had taken root. It must be Andresen who had changed, for the place was the same as ever. Folk and things were unaltered; the mining work had turned away to other tracts, but folk in the wilds had not lost their heads over that; they had their land to till, their crops, their cattle. No great wealth in money, true, but in all the necessaries of life, ay, absolutely all,

Even Eleseus was not reduced to misery because the stream of gold was flowing elsewhere; the worst of it was that in his first exaltation he had bought great stocks of goods that were now unsaleable. Well, they could stay there for the time being; it looked well, at any rate, to have plenty of wares in a store.

No, a man of the wilds did not lose his head. The air was not less healthy now than before; there were folk enough to admire new clothes; there was no need of diamonds. Wine was a thing he knew from the feast at Cana. A man of the wild was not put out by the thought of great things he could not get; art, newspapers, luxuries, politics, and such-like were worth just what folk were willing to pay for them, no more. Growth of the soil was something different, a thing to be procured at any cost; the only source, the origin of all. A dull and desolate existence? Nay, least of all. A man had everything; his powers above, his dreams, his loves, his wealth of superstition. Sivert, walking one evening by the river, stops on a sudden; there on the water are a pair of ducks, male and female. They have sighted him; they are aware of man, and afraid; one of them says something, utters a little sound, a melody in three tones, and the other answers with the same. Then they rise, whirl off like two little wheels a stone's-throw up the river, and settle again. Then, as before, one speaks and the other answers; the same speech as at first, but mark a new delight: *it is set two octaves higher!* Sivert stands looking at the birds, looking past them, far into a dream.

A sound had floated through him, a sweetness, and left him standing there with a delicate, thin recollection of something wild and splendid, something he had known before, and forgotten again. He walks home in silence, says no word of it, makes no boast of it, 'twas not for worldly speech. And it was but Sivert from Sellanraa, went out one evening, young and ordinary as he was, and met with this.

It was not the only thing he met with — there were more adventures beside. Another thing which happened was that Jensine left Sellanraa. And that made Sivert not a little perturbed in his mind.

Ay, it came to that: Jensine would leave, if you please; she wished it so. Oh, Jensine was not one of your common sort, none could say that. Sivert had once offered to drive her back home at once, and on that occasion she had cried, which was a pity; but afterwards she repented of that, and made it clear that she repented, and gave notice and would leave. Ay, a proper way to do.

Nothing could have suited Inger at Sellanraa better than this; Inger was beginning to grow dissatisfied with her maid. Strange; she had nothing to say against her, but the sight of the girl annoyed her, she could hardly endure to have her about the place. It all arose, no doubt, from Inger's state of mind; she had been heavy and religious all that winter, and it would not pass off. "Want to leave, do you? Why, then, well and good," said Inger. It was a blessing, the fulfilment of nightly prayers.

Two grown women they were already, what did they want with this Jensine, fresh as could be and marriageable and all? Inger thought with a certain displeasure of that same marriageableness, thinking, maybe, how she had once been the same herself.

Her deep religiousness did not pass off. She was not full of vice; she had tasted, sipped, let us say, but 'twas not her intent to persevere in that way all through her old age, not by any means; Inger turned aside with horror from the thought. The mine and all its workmen were no longer there — and Heaven be praised. Virtue was not only tolerable, but inevitable, it was a necessary thing; ay, a necessary good, a special grace.

But the world was all awry. Look now, here was Leopoldine, little Leopoldine, a seedling, a slip of a child, going about bursting with sinful health; but an arm round her waist and she would fall helpless — oh, fie! There were spots on her face now, too — a sign in itself of wild blood; ay, her mother remembered well enough, 'twas the wild blood would out. Inger did not condemn her child for a matter of spots on her face; but it must stop, she would have an end of it. And what did that fellow Andresen want coming up to Sellanraa of Sundays, to talk field-work with Isak? Did the two menfolk imagine the child was blind? Ay, young folk were young folk as they had ever been, thirty, forty years ago, but worse than ever now.

"Why, that's as it may be," said Isak, when they

spoke of the matter. "But here's the spring come, and Jensine gone, and who's to manage the summer work?"

"Leopoldine and I can do the haymaking," said Inger. "Ay, I'd rather go raking night and day myself," said she bitterly, and on the point of crying.

Isak could not understand what there was to make such a fuss about; but he had his own ideas, no doubt, and off he went to the edge of the wood, with crowbar and pick, and fell to working at a stone. Nay, indeed, Isak could not see why Jensine should have left them; a good girl, and a worker. To tell the truth, Isak was often at a loss in all save the simplest things — his work, his lawful and natural doings. A broad-shouldered man, well filled out, nothing astral about him at all; he ate like a man and throve on it, and 'twas rarely he was thrown off his balance in any way.

Well, here was this stone. There were stones more in plenty, but here was one to begin with. Isak is looking ahead, to the time when he will need to build a little house here, a little home for himself and Inger, and as well to get to work a bit on the site, and clear it, while Sivert is down at Storborg. Otherwise the boy would be asking questions, and that was not to Isak's mind. The day must come, of course, when Sivert would need all there was of the place for himself — the old folks would be wanting a house apart. Ay, there was never an end of building at Sellanraa; that fodder loft above the

cowshed was not done yet, though the beams and planks for it were there all ready.

Well, then, here was this stone. Nothing so big to look at above ground, but not to be moved at a touch for all that; it must be a heavy fellow. Isak dug round about it, and tried his crowbar, but it would not move. He dug again and tried once more, but no. Back to the house for a spade then, and clear the earth away, then digging again, trying again — no. A mighty heavy beast to shift, thought Isak patiently enough. He dug away now for a steady while, but the stone seemed reaching ever deeper and deeper down, there was no getting a purchase on it. A nuisance it would be if he had to blast it, after all. The boring would make such a noise, and call up every one on the place. He dug. Off again to fetch a levering pole and tried that — no. He dug again. Isak was beginning to be annoyed with this stone; he frowned, and looked at the thing, as if he had just come along to make a general inspection of the stones in that neighbourhood, and found this one particularly stupid. He criticized it; ay, it was a round-faced, idiotic stone, no getting hold of it any way — he was almost inclined to say it was deformed. Blasting? The thing wasn't worth a charge of powder. And was he to give it up, was he to consider the possibility of being beaten by a stone?

He dug. Hard work, that it was, but as to giving up . . . At last he got the nose of his lever down

and tried it; the stone did not move. Technically speaking, there was nothing wrong with his method, but it did not work. What was the matter, then? He had got out stones before in his life. Was he getting old? Funny thing, he he he! Ridiculous, indeed. True, he had noticed lately that he was not so strong as he had been — that is to say, he had noticed nothing of the sort, never heeded it; 'twas only imagination. And he goes at the stone once more, with the best will in the world.

Oh, 'twas no little matter when Isak bore down on a levering pole with all his weight. There he is now, hoisting and hoisting again, a Cyclop, enormous, with a torso that seems built in one to the knees. A certain pomp and splendour about him; his equator was astounding.

But the stone did not move.

No help for it; he must dig again. Try blasting? Not a word! No, dig again. He was intent on his work now. The stone should come up! It would be wrong to say there was anything at all perverse in this on Isak's part; it was the ingrown love of a worker on the soil, but altogether without tenderness. It was a foolish sight; first gathering, as it were, about the stone from all sides, then making a dash at it, then digging all round its sides and fumbling at it, throwing up the earth with his bare hands, ay, so he did. Yet there was nothing of a caress in it all. Warmth, yes, but the warmth of zeal alone.

Try the lever again? He thrust it down where

there was best hold — no. An altogether remarkable instance of obstinacy and defiance on the part of the stone. But it seemed to be giving. Isak tries again, with a touch of hope; the earth-breaker has a feeling now that the stone is no longer invincible. Then the lever slipped, throwing him to the ground. "Devil!" said he. Ay, he said that. His cap had got thrust down over one ear as he fell, making him look like a robber, like a Spaniard. He spat.

Here comes Inger. "Isak, come in and have your food now," says she, kindly and pleasant as can be.

"Ay," says he, but will have her no nearer, and wants no questions.

Oh, but Inger, never dreaming, she comes nearer.

"What's in your mind now?" she asks, to soften him with a hint of the way he thinks out some new grand thing almost every day.

But Isak is sullen, terribly sullen and stern; he says: "Nay, I don't know."

And Inger again, foolish that she is — ugh, keeps on talking and asking and will not go.

"Seeing as you've seen it yourself," says he at last, "I'm getting up this stone here."

"Ho, going to get him up?"

"Ay."

"And couldn't I help a bit at all?" she asks.

Isak shakes his head. But it was a kindly thought, anyway, that she would have helped him, and he can hardly be harsh in return.

" If you just wait the least bit of a while," says he, and runs home for the hammers.

If he could only get the stone rough a bit, knocking off a flake or so in the right spot, it would give the lever a better hold. Inger holds the setting-hammer, and Isak strikes. Strikes, strikes. Ay, sure enough, off goes a flake. " 'Twas a good help," says Isak, " and thanks. But don't trouble about food for me this bit of a while, I must get this stone up first."

But Inger does not go. And to tell the truth, Isak is pleased enough to have her there watching him at his work; 'tis a thing has always pleased him, since their young days. And lo, he gets a fine purchase now on the lever, and puts his weight into it — the stone moves! " He's moving," says Inger.

" 'Tis but your nonsense," says Isak.

" Nonsense, indeed! But it is! "

Got so far, then — and that was something. The stone was, so to speak, converted now, was on his side; they were working together. Isak hoists and heaves with his lever, and the stone moves, but no more. He keeps at it a while, nothing more. All at once he understands that it is not merely a question of weight, the dead pull of his body; no, the fact is that he has no longer his old strength, he has lost the tough agility that makes all the difference. Weight? An easy matter enough to hang on with his weight and break an iron-shod pole. No, he was weakening, that was it. And the patient man is filled with bitterness at the thought — at

least he might have been spared the shame of having Inger here to see it!

Suddenly he drops the lever and grasps the sledge. A fury takes him, he is minded to go at it violently now. And see, his cap still hangs on one ear, robber-fashion, and now he steps mightily, threateningly, round the stone, trying, as it were, to set himself in the proper light; ho, he will leave that stone a ruin and a wreck of what it had been. Why not? When a man is filled with mortal hatred of a stone, it is a mere formality to crush it. And suppose the stone resists, suppose it declines to be crushed? Why, let it try — and see which of the two survives!

But then it is that Inger speaks up, a little timidly, again; seeing, no doubt, what is troubling him: "What if we both hang on the stick there?" And the thing she calls a stick is the lever, nothing else.

"No!" cries Isak furiously. But after a moment's thought he says: "Well, well, since you're here — though you might as well have gone home. Let's try."

And they get the stone up on edge. Ay, they manage that. And "Puh!" says Isak.

But now comes a revelation, a strange thing to see. The underside of the stone is flat, mightily broad, finely cut, smooth and even as a floor. The stone is but the half of a stone, the other half is somewhere close by, no doubt. Isak knows well enough that two halves of the same stone may lie in different places; the frost, no doubt, that in course of time had shifted them apart. But he is all won-

der and delight at the find; 'tis a useful stone of the best, a door-slab. A round sum of money would not have filled this fieldworker's mind with such content. "A fine door-slab," says he proudly.

And Inger, simple creature: "Why! Now how on earth could you tell that beforehand?"

"H'm," says Isak. "Think I'd go here digging about for nothing?"

They walk home together, Isak enjoying new admiration on false pretences; 'twas something he had not deserved, but it tasted but little different from the real thing. He lets it be understood that he has been looking out for a suitable door-slab for a long time, and had found it at last. After that, of course, there could be nothing in the least suspicious about his working there again; he could root about as much as he pleased on pretext of looking for the other half. And when Sivert came home, he could get him to help.

But if it had come to this, that he could no longer go out alone and heave up a stone, why, things were sorely changed; ay, 'twas a bad look-out, and the more need to get that site cleared quick as might be. Age was upon him, he was ripening for the chimney-corner. The triumph he had stolen in the matter of the door-slab faded away in a few days; 'twas a false thing, and not made to last. Isak stooped a little now in his walk.

Had he not once been so much of a man that he grew wakeful and attentive in a moment if one but said a word of stone, a word of digging? And 'twas

no long time since, but a few years, no more. Ay, and in those days, folk that were shy of a bit of draining work kept out of his way. Now he was beginning, little by little, to take such matters more calmly; eyah, *Herregud!* All things were changed, the land itself was different now, with broad telegraph roads up through the woods, that had not been there before, and rocks blasted and sundered up by the water, as they had not been before. And folk, too, were changed. They did not greet coming and going as in the old days, but nodded only, or maybe not even that.

But then — in the old days there had been no Sellanraa, but only a turf hut, while now . . . There had been no Margrave in the old days.

Ay, but Margrave, what was he now? A pitiful thing, nothing superhuman, but old and fading, going the way of all flesh. What though he had good bowels, and could eat well, when it gave him no strength? 'Twas Sivert had the strength now, and a mercy it was so — but think, if Isak had had it too! A sorry thing, to find his works running down. He had toiled like a man, carrying loads enough for any beast of burden; now, he could exercise his patience in resting.

Isak is ill-pleased, heavy at heart.

Here lies an old hat, an old sou'wester, rotting on the ground. Carried there by the gale, maybe, or maybe the lads had brought it there to the edge of the wood years ago, when they were little ones. It lies there year after year, rotting and rotting away;

but once it had been a new sou'wester, all yellow and new. Isak remembers the day he came home with it from the store, and Inger had said it was a fine hat. A year or so after, he had taken it to a painter down in the village, and had it blacked and polished, and the brim done in green. And when he came home, Inger thought it a finer hat than before. Inger always thought everything was fine; ay, 'twas a good life those days, cutting faggots, with Inger to look on — his best days. And when March and April came, Inger and he would be wild after each other, just like the birds and beasts in the woods; and when May was come, he would sow his corn and plant potatoes, living and thriving from day to dawn. Work and sleep, loving and dreaming, he was like the first big ox, and that was a wonder to see, big and bright as a king. But there was no such May to the years now. No such thing.

Isak was sorely despondent for some days. Dark days they were. He felt neither wish nor strength to start work on the fodder loft — that could be left for Sivert to do some day. The thing to be done now was the house for himself — the last house to build. He could not long hide from Sivert what he was doing; he was clearing the ground, and plain to see what for. And one day he told.

"There's a good bit of stone if we'd any use for stonework," said he. "And there's another."

Sivert showed no surprise, and only said: "Ay, first-rate stones."

"What you might think," said his father.

"We've been digging round here now to find that other door-slab piece; might almost do to build here. I don't know. . . ."

"Ay, 'tis no bad place to build," said Sivert, looking round.

"Think so? 'Twas none so bad, maybe, to have a bit of a place to house folk if any should come along."

"Ay."

"A couple of rooms'd be as well. You saw how 'twas when they Swedish gentlemen came, and no proper place to house them. But what you think: a bit of a kitchen as well, maybe, if 'twas any cooking to be done?"

"Ay, 'twould be a shame to built with never a bit of kitchen," says Sivert.

"You think so?"

Isak said no more. But Sivert, he was a fine lad to grasp things, and get into his head all at once just what was needed in a place to put up Swedish gentlemen that chanced to come along; never so much as asked a single question, but only said: "Doing it my way, now, you'd put up a bit of a shed on the north wall. Folks coming along, 'd be useful to have a shed place to hang up wet clothes and things."

And his father agrees at once: "Ay, the very thing."

They work at their stones again in silence. Then asks Isak: "Eleseus, he's not come home, I suppose?"

And Sivert answers evasively: "He'll be coming home soon."

'Twas that way with Eleseus: he was all for staying away, living away on journeys. Couldn't he have written for the goods? But he must go round and buy them on the spot. Got them so much cheaper. Ay, maybe, but what about cost of the journey? He had his own way of thinking, it seemed. And then, what did he want, anyway, with more cotton stuff, and coloured ribbons for christening caps, and black and white straw hats, and long tobacco pipes? No one ever bought such things up in the hills; and the village folk, they only came up to Storborg when they'd no money. Eleseus was clever enough in his way — only to see him write on a paper, or do sums with a bit of chalk! "Ay, with a head like yours," said folk, admiring him. And that was true enough; but he was spending overmuch. They village folk never paid their owings, and yet even a fellow like Brede Olsen could come up to Storborg that winter and get cotton print and coffee and molasses and paraffin on credit.

Isak has laid out a deal of money already for Eleseus, and his store and his long journeyings about; there's not overmuch left now out of the riches from the mine — and what then?

"How d'you think he's getting on, Eleseus?" asks Isak suddenly.

"Getting on?" says Sivert, to gain time.

"Doesn't seem to be doing so well."

"H'm. He says it'll go all right."

" You spoken to him about it? "

" Nay; but Andresen he says so."

Isak thought over this, and shook his head. " Nay, I doubt it's going ill," says he. " 'Tis a pity for the lad."

And Isak gloomier than ever now, for all he'd been none too bright before.

But then Sivert flashes out a bit of news: " There's more folk coming to live now."

" How d'you say? "

" Two new holdings. They've bought up close by us."

Isak stands still with his crowbar in hand; this was news, and good news, the best that could be. " That makes ten of us here," says he. And Isak learns exactly where the new men have bought, he knows the country all round in his head, and nods. " Ay, they've done well there; wood for firing in plenty, and some big timber here and there. Ground slopes down sou'west. Ay . . ."

Settlers — nothing could beat them, anyway — here were new folk coming to live. The mine had come to nothing, but so much the better for the land. A desert, a dying place? Far from it, all about was swarming with life; two new men, four new hands to work, fields and meadows and homes. Oh, the little green tracts in a forest, a hut and water, children and cattle about. Corn waving on the moorlands where naught but horsetail grew before, bluebells nodding on the fells, and yellow sunlight blazing in the ladyslipper flowers outside a house. And

human beings living there, move and talk and think and are there with heaven and earth.

Here stands the first of them all, the first man in the wilds. He came that way, kneedeep in marsh-growth and heather, found a sunny slope and settled there. Others came after him, they trod a path across the waste *Almenning;* others again, and the path became a road; carts drove there now. Isak may be content, may start with a little thrill of pride; he was the founder of a district, the pioneer.

" Look here, we can't go wasting time on this bit of a house place if we're to get that fodder loft done this year," says he.

With a new brightness, new spirit; as it were, new courage and life.

Chapter X

A WOMAN tramping up along the road. A steady summer rain falls, wetting her, but she does not heed it; other things are in her mind — anxiety. Barbro it is, and no other — Brede's girl, Barbro. Anxious, ay; not knowing how the venture will end; she has gone from service at the Lensmand's, and left the village. That is the matter.

She keeps away from all the farms on the road up, unwilling to meet with folk; easy to see where she was going, with a bundle of clothing on her back. Ay, going to Maaneland, to take service there again.

Ten months she has been at the Lensmand's now, and 'tis no little time, reckoned out in days and nights, but an eternity reckoned in longing and oppression. It had been bearable at first, Fru Heyerdahl looking after her kindly, giving her aprons and neat things to wear; 'twas a joy to be sent on errands to the store with such fine clothes to wear. Barbro had been in the village as a child; she knew all the village folk from the days when she had played there, gone to school there, kissed the lads there, and joined in many games with stones and shells. Bearable enough for a month or so. But then Fru Heyerdahl had begun to be even more care-

ful about her, and when the Christmas festivities began, she was strict. And what good could ever come of that? It was bound to spoil things. Barbro could never have endured it but that she had certain hours of the night to herself; from two to six in the morning she was more or less safe, and had stolen pleasures not a few. What about Cook, then, for not reporting her? A nice sort of woman she must be! Oh, an ordinary woman enough, as the world finds them; Cook went out without leave herself. They took it in turns.

And it was quite a long time before they were found out. Barbro was by no means so depraved that it showed in her face, impossible to accuse her of immorality. Immorality? She made all the resistance one could expect. When young men asked her to go to a Christmas dance, she said "No" once, said "No" twice, but the third time she would say: "I'll try and come from two to six." Just as a decent woman should, not trying to make herself out worse than she is, and making a display of daring. She was a servant-girl, serving all her time, and knew no other recreation than fooling with men. It was all she asked for. Fru Heyerdahl came and lectured her, lent her books — and a fool for her pains. Barbro had lived in Bergen and read the papers and been to the theatre! She was no innocent lamb from the countryside.

But Fru Heyerdahl must have grown suspicious at last. One day she comes up at three in the morning to the maids' room and calls: "Barbro!"

"Yes," answers Cook.

"It's Barbro I want. Isn't she there? Open the door."

Cook opens the door and explains as agreed upon, that Barbro had had to run home for a minute about something. Home for a minute at this time of night? Fru Heyerdahl has a good deal to say about that. And in the morning there is a scene. Brede is sent for, and Fru Heyerdahl asks: "Was Barbro at home with you last night — at three o'clock?"

Brede is unprepared, but answers: "Three o'clock? Yes, yes, quite right. We sat up late, there was something we had to talk about," says Brede.

The Lensmand's lady then solemnly declares that Barbro shall go out no more at nights.

"No, no," says Brede.

"Not as long as she's in this house."

"No, no; there, you can see, Barbro, I told you so," says her father.

"You can go and see your parents now and then during the day," says her mistress.

But Fru Heyerdahl was wide awake enough, and her suspicion was not gone; she waited a week, and tried at four in the morning. "Barbro!" she called. Oh, but this time 'twas Cook's turn out, and Barbro was at home; the maids' room was a nest of innocence. Her mistress had to hit on something in a hurry.

"Did you take in the washing last night?"

"Yes."

"That's a good thing, it's blowing so hard. . . . Good-night."

But it was not so pleasant for Fru Heyerdahl to get her husband to wake her in the middle of the night and go padding across herself to the servants' room to see if they were at home. They could do as they pleased, she would trouble herself no more.

And if it had not been for sheer ill-luck, Barbro might have stayed the year out in her place that way. But a few days ago the trouble had come.

It was in the kitchen, early one morning. Barbro had been having some words with Cook, and no light words either; they raised their voices, forgetting all about their mistress. Cook was a mean thing and a cheat, she had sneaked off last night out of her turn because it was Sunday. And what excuse had she to give? Going to say good-bye to her favourite sister that was off to America? Not a bit of it; Cook had made no excuse at all, but simply said that Sunday night was one had been owing to her for a long time.

"Oh, you've not an atom of truth nor decency in your body!" said Barbro.

And there was the mistress in the doorway.

She had come out, perhaps, with no more thought than that the girls were making too much noise, but now she stood looking very closely at Barbro, at Barbro's apron over her breast; ay, leaning forward and looking very closely indeed. It was a painful moment. And suddenly Fru Heyerdahl screams and draws back to the door. What on earth can it

be? thinks Barbro, and looks down at herself. *Herregud!* a flea, nothing more. Barbro cannot help smiling, and being not unused to acting under critical circumstances, she flicks off the flea at once.

"On the floor!" cried Fru Heyerdahl. "Are you mad, girl? Pick it up at once!" Barbro begins looking about for it, and once more acts with presence of mind: she makes as if she had caught the creature, and drops it realistically into the fire.

"Where did you get it?" asks her mistress angrily.

"Where I got it?"

"Yes, that's what I want to know."

But here Barbro makes a bad mistake. "At the store," she ought to have said, of course — that would have been quite enough. As it was — she did not know where she had got the creature, but had an idea it must have been from Cook.

Cook at the height of passion at once: "From me! You'll please to keep your fleas to yourself, so there!"

"Anyway, 'twas you was out last night."

Another mistake — she should have said nothing about it. Cook has no longer any reason for keeping silence, and now she let out the whole thing, and told all about the nights Barbro had been out. Fru Heyerdahl mightily indignant; she cares nothing about Cook, 'tis Barbro she is after, the girl whose character she has answered for. And even then all might have been well if Barbro had bowed her head like a reed, and been cast down with shame, and

promised all manner of things for the future — but no. Her mistress is forced to remind her of all she has done for her, and at that, if you please, Barbro falls to answering back, ay, so foolish was she, saying impertinent things. Or perhaps she was cleverer than might seem; trying on purpose, maybe, to bring the matter to a head, and get out of the place altogether? Says her mistress:

"After I've saved you from the clutches of the Law."

"As for that," answers Barbro, "I'd have just as pleased if you hadn't."

"And that's all the thanks I get," says her mistress.

"Least said the better, perhaps," says Barbro. "I wouldn't have got more than a month or two, anyway, and done with it."

Fru Heyerdahl is speechless for a moment; ay, for a little while she stands saying nothing, only opening and closing her mouth. The first thing she says is to tell the girl to go; she will have no more of her.

"Just as you please," says Barbro.

For some days after that Barbro had been at home with her parents. But she could not go on staying there. True, her mother sold coffee, and there came a deal of folk to the house, but Barbro could not live on that — and maybe she had other reasons of her own for wanting to get into a settled position again. And so today she had taken a sack of clothes on her back, and started up along the road over the moors.

Question now, whether Axel Ström would take her? But she had had the banns put up, anyway, the Sunday before.

Raining, and dirty underfoot, but Barbro tramps on. Evening is drawing on, but not dark yet at that season of the year. Poor Barbro — she does not spare herself, but goes on her errand like another; she is bound for a place, to commence another struggle there. She has never spared herself, to tell the truth, never been of a lazy sort, and that is why she has her neat figure now and pretty shape. Barbro is quick to learn things, and often to her own undoing; what else could one expect? She had learned to save herself at a pinch, to slip from one scrape to another, but keeping all along some better qualities; a child's death is nothing to her, but she can still give sweets to a child alive. Then she has a fine musical ear, can strum softly and correctly on a guitar, singing hoarsely the while; pleasant and slightly mournful to hear. Spared herself? no; so little, indeed, that she has thrown herself away altogether, and felt no loss. Now and again she cries, and breaks her heart over this or that in her life — but that is only natural, it goes with the songs she sings, 'tis the poetry and friendly sweetness in her; she had fooled herself and many another with the same. Had she been able to bring the guitar with her this evening she could have strummed a little for Axel when she came.

She manages so as to arrive late in the evening; all is quiet at Maaneland when she reaches there.

See, Axel has already begun haymaking, the grass is cut near the house, and some of the hay already in. And then she reckons out that Oline, being old, will be sleeping in the little room, and Axel lying out in the hayshed, just as she herself had done. She goes to the door she knows so well, breathless as a thief, and calls softly: "Axel!"

"What's that?" asks Axel all at once.

"Nay, 'tis only me," says Barbro, and steps in. "You couldn't house me for the night?" she says.

Axel looks at her and is slow to think, and sits there in his underclothes, looking at her. "So 'tis you," says he. "And where'll you be going?"

"Why, depends first of all if you've need of help to the summer work," says she.

Axel thinks over that, and says: "Aren't you going to stay where you were, then?"

"Nay; I've finished at the Lensmand's."

"I might be needing help, true enough, for the summer," said Axel. "But what's it mean, anyway, you wanting to come back?"

"Nay, never mind me," says Barbro, putting it off. "I'll go on again tomorrow. Go to Sellanraa and cross the hills. I've a place there."

"You've fixed up with some one there?"

"Ay."

"I might be needing summer help myself," says Axel again.

Barbro is wet through; she has other clothes in her sack, and must change. "Don't mind about

me," says Axel, and moves a bit toward the door, no more.

Barbro takes off her wet clothes, they talking the while, and Axel turning his head pretty often towards her. "Now you'd better go out just a bit," says she.

"Out?" says he. And indeed 'twas no weather to go out in. He stands there, seeing her more and more stripped; 'tis hard to keep his eyes away; and Barbro is so thoughtless, she might well have put on dry things bit by bit as she took off the wet, but no. Her shift is thin and clings to her; she unfastens a button at one shoulder, and turns aside, 'tis nothing new for her. Axel dead silent then, and he sees how she makes but a touch or two with her hands and washes the last of her clothes from her. 'Twas splendidly done, to his mind. And there she stands, so utterly thoughtless of her. . . .

A while after, they lay talking together. Ay, he had need of help for the summer, no doubt about that.

"They said something that way," says Barbro.

He had begun his mowing and haymaking all alone again; Barbro could judge for herself how awkward it was for him now.— Ay, Barbro understood.— On the other hand, it was Barbro herself that had run away and left him before, without a soul to help him, he can't forget that. And taken her rings with her into the bargain. And on top of all

that, shameful as it was, the paper that kept on coming, that Bergen newspaper it seemed he would never get rid of; he had had to go on paying for it a whole year after.

"'Twas shameful mean of them," says Barbro, taking his part all the time.

But seeing her all submissive and gentle, Axel himself could not be altogether heartless towards her; he agreed that Barbro might have some reason to be angry with him in return for the way he had taken the telegraph business from her father. "But as for that," said he, "your father can have the telegraph business again for me; I'll have no more of it, 'tis but a waste of time."

"Ay," says Barbro.

Axel thought for a while, then asked straight out: "Well, what about it now, would you want to come for the summer and no more?"

"Nay," says Barbro, "let it be as you please."

"You mean that, and truly?"

"Ay, just as you please, and I'll be pleased with the same. You've no call to doubt about me any more."

"H'm."

"No, 'tis true. And I've ordered about the banns."

H'm. This was not so bad. Axel lay thinking it over a long time. If she meant it in earnest this time, and not shameful deceit again, then he'd a woman of his own and help for as long as might be.

"I could get a woman to come from our parts,"

said he, " and she's written saying she'd come. But then I'd have to pay her fare from America."

Says Barbro: " Ho, she's in America, then? "

" Ay. Went over last year she did, but doesn't care to stay."

" Never mind about her," says Barbro. " And what'd become of me then? " says she, and begins to be soft and mournful.

" No. That's why I've not fixed up all certain with her."

And after that, Barbro must have something to show in return; she confessed about how she could have taken a lad in Bergen, and he was a carter in a big brewery, a mighty big concern, and a good position. " And he'll be sorrowing for me now, I doubt," says Barbro, and makes a little sob. " But you know how 'tis, Axel; when there's two been so much together as you and I, 'tis more than I could ever forget. And you can forget me as much as you please."

" What! me? " says Axel. " Nay, no need to lie there crying for that, my girl, for I've never forgot you."

" Well . . ."

Barbro feels a deal better after that confession, and says: " Anyway, paying her fare all the way from America when there's no need . . ." She advises him to have nothing to do with that business; 'twould be over costly, and there was no need. Barbro seemed resolved to build up his happiness herself.

They came to agreement all round in the course of the night. 'Twas not as if they were strangers; they had talked over everything before. Even the necessary marriage ceremony was to take place before St. Olaf's Day and harvest; they had no need to hide things, and Barbro was now herself most eager to get it done at once. Axel was not any put out at her eagerness, and it did not make him any way suspicious; far from it, he was flattered and encouraged to find her so. Ay, he was a worker in the fields, no doubt, a thick-skinned fellow, not used to looking over fine at things, nothing delicate beyond measure; there were things he was obliged to do, and he looked to what was useful first of all. Moreover, here was Barbro all new and pretty again, and nice to him, almost sweeter than before. Like an apple she was, and he bit at it. The banns were already put up.

As to the dead child and the trial, neither said a word of that.

But they did speak of Oline, of how they were to get rid of her. "Ay, she must go," said Barbro. "We've nothing to thank her for, anyway. She's naught but tale-bearing and malice."

But it proved no easy matter to get Oline to go.

The very first morning, when Barbro appeared, Oline was clear, no doubt, as to her fate. She was troubled at once, but tried not to show it, and brought out a chair. They had managed up to then at Maaneland. Axel had carried water and wood and done the heaviest work, and Oline doing

the rest. And gradually she had come to reckon on staying the rest of her life on the place. Now came Barbro and upset it all.

"If we'd only a grain of coffee in the house you should have it," said she to Barbro. "Going farther up, maybe?"

"No," said Barbro.

"Ho! Not going farther?"

"No."

"Why, 'tis no business of mine, no," says Oline. "Going down again, maybe?"

"No. Nor going down again. I'm staying here for now."

"Staying here, are you?"

"Ay, staying here, I doubt."

Oline waits for a moment, using her old head, full of policy. "Ay, well," says she. "'Twill save me, then, no doubt. And glad I'll be for the same."

"Oho," says Barbro in jest, "has Axel here been so hard on you this while?"

"Hard on me? Axel! Oh, there's no call to turn an old body's words, there's naught but living on and waiting for the blessed end. Axel that's been as a father and a messenger from the Highest to me day and hour together, and gospel truth the same. But seeing I've none of my own folks here, and living alone and rejected under a stranger's roof, with all my kin over across the hills . . ."

But for all that, Oline stayed on. They could not get rid of her till after they were wed, and Oline made a deal of reluctance, but said "Yes" at last,

and would stay so long to please them, and look to house and cattle while they went down to the church. It took two days. But when they came back wedded and all, Oline stayed on as before. She put off going; one day she was feeling poorly, she said; the next it looked like rain. She made up to Barbro with smooth words about the food. Oh, there was a mighty difference in the food now at Maaneland; 'twas different living now, and a mighty difference in the coffee now. Oh, she stopped at nothing, that Oline; asked Barbro's advice on things she knew better herself. "What you think now, should I milk cows as they stand in their place and order, or should I take cow Bordelin first?"

"You can do as you please."

"Ay, 'tis as I always said," exclaims Oline. "You've been out in the world and lived among great folks and fine folks, and learned all and everything. 'Tis different with the likes of me."

Ay, Oline stopped at nothing, she was intriguing all day long. Sitting there telling Barbro how she herself was friends and on the best of terms with Barbro's father, with Brede Olsen! Ho, many a pleasant hour they'd had together, and a kindly man and rich and grand to boot was Brede, and never a hard word in his mouth.

But this could not go on for ever; neither Axel nor Barbro cared to have Oline there any longer, and Barbro had taken over all her work. Oline made no complaint, but she flashed dangerous glances at

her young mistress and changed her tone ever so little.

"Ay, great folk, 'tis true. Axel, he was in town a while last harvest-time — you didn't meet him there, maybe? Nay, that's true, you were in Bergen that time. But he went into town, he did; 'twas all to buy a mowing-machine and a harrow-machine. And what's folk at Sellanraa now beside you here? Nothing to compare!"

She was beginning to shoot out little pinpricks, but even that did not help her now; neither of them feared her. Axel told her straight out one day that she must go.

"Go?" says Oline. "And how? Crawling, belike?" No, she would not go, saying by way of excuse that she was poorly, and could not move her legs. And to make things bad as could be, when once they had taken the work off her hands, and she had nothing to do at all, she collapsed, and was thoroughly ill. She kept about for a week in spite of it, Axel looking furiously at her; but she stayed on from sheer malice, and at last she had to take to her bed.

And now she lay there, not in the least awaiting her blessed end, but counting the hours till she should be up and about again. She asked for a doctor, a piece of extravagance unheard of in the wilds.

"Doctor?" said Axel. "Are you out of your senses?"

"How d'you mean, then?" said Oline quite

gently, as to something she could not understand. Ay, so gentle and smooth-tongued was she, so glad to think she need not be a burden to others; she could pay for the doctor herself.

"Ho, can you?" said Axel.

"Why, and couldn't I, then?" says Oline. "And, anyway, you'd not have me lie here and die like a dumb beast in the face of the Lord?"

Here Barbro put in a word, and was unwise enough to say:

"Well, what you've got to complain of, I'd like to know, when I bring you in your meals and all myself? As for coffee, I've said you're better without it, and meaning well."

"Is that Barbro?" says Oline, turning just her eyes and no more to look for her; ay, she is poorly is Oline, and a pitiful sight with her eyes screwed round cornerways. "Ay, maybe 'tis as you say, Barbro, if a tiny drop of coffee'd do me any harm, a spoonful and no more."

"If 'twas me in your stead, I'd be thinking of other things than coffee at this hour," says Barbro.

"Ay, 'tis as I say," answers Oline. "'Twas never your way to wish and desire a fellow-creature's end, but rather they should be converted and live. What . . . ay, I'm lying here and seeing things. . . . Is it with child you are now, Barbro?"

"What's that you say?" cries Barbro furiously; and goes on again: "Oh, 'twould serve you right if I took and heaved you out on the muck-heap for your wicked tongue."

And at that the invalid was silent for one thoughtful moment, her mouth trembling as if trying so hard to smile, but dare not.

"I heard a some one calling last night," says she.

"She's out of her senses," says Axel, whispering.

"Nay, out of my senses that I'm not. Like some one calling it was. From the woods, or maybe from the stream up yonder. Strange to hear — as it might be a bit of a child crying out. Was that Barbro went out?"

"Ay," says Axel. "Sick of your nonsense, and no wonder."

"Nonsense, you call it, and out of my senses, and all? Ah, but not so far as you'd like to think," says Oline. "Nay, 'tis not the Almighty's will and decree I should come before the Throne and before the Lamb as yet, with all I know of goings-on here at Maaneland. I'll be up and about again, never fear; but you'd better be fetching a doctor, Axel, 'tis quicker that way. What about that cow you were going to give me?"

"Cow? What cow?"

"That cow you promised me. Was it Bordelin, maybe?"

"You're talking wild," says Axel.

"You know how you promised me a cow the day I saved your life."

"Nay, that I never knew."

At that Oline lifts up her head and looks at him. Grey and bald she is, a head standing up on a long, scraggy neck — ugly as a witch, as an ogress out

of a story. And Axel starts at the sight, and fumbles with a hand behind his back for the latch of the door.

"Ho," says Oline, "so you're that sort! Ay, well — say no more of it now. I can live without the cow from this day forth, and never a word I'll say nor breathe of it again. But well that you've shown what sort and manner of man you are this day; I know it now. Ay, and I'll know it another time."

But Oline, she died that night — some time in the night; anyway, she was cold next morning when they came in.

Oline — an aged creature. Born and died. . . .

'Twas no sorrow to Axel nor Barbro to bury her, and be quit of her for ever; there was less to be on their guard against now, they could be at rest. Barbro is having trouble with her teeth again; save for that, all is well. But that everlasting woollen muffler over her face, and shifting it aside every time there's a word to say —'twas plaguy and troublesome enough, and all this toothache is something of a mystery to Axel. He has noticed, certainly, that she chews her food in a careful sort of way, but there's not a tooth missing in her head.

"Didn't you get new teeth?" he asks.

"Ay, so I did."

"And are they aching, too?"

"Ah, you with your nonsense!" says Barbro irritably, for all that Axel has asked innocently enough.

And in her bitterness she lets out what is the matter. "You can see how 'tis with me, surely?"

How 'twas with her? Axel looks closer, and fancies she is stouter than need be.

"Why, you can't be —'tis surely not another child again?" says he.

"Why, you know it is," says she.

Axel stares foolishly at her. Slow of thought as he is, he sits there counting for a bit: one week, two weeks, getting on the third week. . . .

"Nay, how I should know . . ." says he.

But Barbro is losing all patience with this debate, and bursts out, crying aloud, crying like a deeply injured creature: "Nay, you can take and bury me, too, in the ground, and then you'll be rid of me."

Strange, what odd things a woman can find to cry for!

Axel had never a thought of burying her in the ground; he is a thick-skinned fellow, looking mainly to what is useful; a pathway carpeted with flowers is beyond his needs.

"Then you'll not be fit to work in the fields this summer?" says he.

"Not work?" says Barbro, all terrified again. And then — strange what odd things a woman can find to smile for! Axel, taking it that way, sent a flow of hysterical joy through Barbro, and she burst out: "I'll work for two! Oh, you wait and see, Axel; I'll do all you set me to, and more beyond. Wear myself to the bone, I will, and be thankful, if only you'll put up with me so!"

More tears and smiles and tenderness after that. Only the two of them in the wilds, none to disturb them; open doors and a humming of flies in the summer heat. All so tender and willing was Barbro; ay, he might do as he pleased with her, and she was willing.

After sunset he stands harnessing up to the mowing-machine; there's a bit he can still get done ready for tomorrow. Barbro comes hurrying out, as if she's something important, and says:

"Axel, how ever could you think of getting one home from America? She couldn't get here before winter, and what use of her then?" And that was something had just come into her head, and she must come running out with it as if 'twas something needful.

But 'twas no way needful; Axel had seen from the first that taking Barbro would mean getting help for all the year. No swaying and swinging with Axel, no thinking with his head among the stars. Now he's a woman of his own to look after the place, he can keep on the telegraph business for a bit. 'Tis a deal of money in the year, and good to reckon with as long as he's barely enough for his needs from the land, and little to sell. All sound and working well; all good reality. And little to fear from Brede about the telegraph line, seeing he's son-in-law to Brede now.

Ay, things are looking well, looking grand with Axel now.

Chapter XI

AND time goes on; winter is passed; spring comes again.

Isak has to go down to the village one day — and why not? What for? "Nay, I don't know," says he. But he gets the cart cleaned up all fine, puts in the seat, and drives off, and a deal of victuals and such put in, too — and why not? 'Twas for Eleseus at Storborg. Never a horse went out from Sellanraa but there was something taken down to Eleseus.

When Isak came driving down over the moors, 'twas no little event, for he came but rarely, Sivert going most ways in his stead. At the two farms nearest down, folk stand at the door of the huts and tell one another: "'Tis Isak himself; and what'll he be going down after today?" And, coming down as far as to Maaneland, there's Barbro at the glass window with a child in her arms, and sees him, and says: "'Tis Isak himself!"

He comes to Storborg and pulls up. "*Ptro!* Is Eleseus at home?"

Eleseus comes out. Ay, he's at home; not gone yet, but just going — off on his spring tour of the towns down south.

"Here's some things your mother sent down,"

says his father. "Don't know what it is, but nothing much, I doubt."

Eleseus takes the things, and thanks him, and asks:

"There wasn't a letter, I suppose, or anything that sort?"

"Ay," says his father, feeling in pockets, "there was. 'Tis from little Rebecca I think they said."

Eleseus takes the letter, 'tis that he has been waiting for. Feels it all nice and thick, and says to his father:

"Well, 'twas lucky you came in time — though 'tis two days before I'm off yet. If you'd like to stay a bit, you might take my trunk down."

Isak gets down and ties up his horse, and goes for a stroll over the ground. Little Andresen is no bad worker on the land in Eleseus' service; true, he has had Sivert from Sellanraa with horses, but he has done a deal of work on his own account, draining bogs, and hiring a man himself to set the ditches with stone. No need of buying fodder at Storborg that year, and next, like as not, Eleseus would be keeping a horse of his own. Thanks to Andresen and the way he worked on the land.

After a bit of a while, Eleseus calls down that he's ready with his trunk. Ready to go himself, too, by the look of it; in a fine blue suit, white collar, galoshes, and a walking-stick. True, he will have two days to wait for the boat, but no matter; he may just as well stay down in the village; 'tis all the same if he's here or there.

And father and son drive off. Andresen watches them from the door of the shop and wishes a pleasant journey.

Isak is all thought for his boy, and would give him the seat to himself; but Eleseus will have none of that, and sits up by his side. They come to Breidablik, and suddenly Eleseus has forgotten something. "*Ptro!* — What is it?" asks his father.

Oh, his umbrella! Eleseus has forgotten his umbrella; but he can't explain all about it, and only says: "Never mind, drive on."

"Don't you want to turn back?"

"No; drive on."

But a nuisance it was; how on earth had he come to leave it? 'Twas all in a hurry, through his father being there waiting. Well, now he had better buy a new umbrella at Trondhjem when he got there. 'Twas no importance either way if he had one umbrella or two. But for all that, Eleseus is out of humour with himself; so much so that he jumps down and walks behind.

They could hardly talk much on the way down after that, seeing Isak had to turn round every time and speak over his shoulder. Says Isak: "How long you're going to be away?"

And Eleseus answers: "Oh, say three weeks, perhaps, or a month at the outside."

His father marvels how folk don't get lost in the big towns, and never find their way back. But Eleseus answers, as to that, he's used to living in

towns, and never got lost, never had done in his life.

Isak thinks it a shame to be sitting up there all alone, and calls out: "Here, you come and drive a bit; I'm getting tired."

Eleseus won't hear of his father getting down, and gets up beside him again. But first they must have something to eat — out of Isak's well-filled pack. Then they drive on again.

They come to the two holdings farthest down; easy to see they are nearing the village now; both the houses have white curtains in the little window facing toward the road, and a flag-pole stuck up on top of the hayloft for Constitution Day. "'Tis Isak himself," said folk on the two new farms as the cart went by.

At last Eleseus gives over thinking of his own affairs and his own precious self enough to ask: "What you driving down for today?"

"H'm," says his father. "'Twas nothing much today." But then, after all, Eleseus was going away; no harm, perhaps, in telling him. "'Tis blacksmith's girl, Jensine, I'm going down for," says his father; ay, he admits so much.

"And you're going down yourself for that? Couldn't Sivert have gone?" says Eleseus. Ay, Eleseus knew no better, nothing better than to think Sivert would go down to the smith's to fetch Jensine, after she had thought so much of herself as to leave Sellanraa!

No, 'twas all awry with the haymaking the year before. Inger had put in all she could, as she had

promised. Leopoldine did her share too, not to speak of having a machine for a horse to rake. But the hay was much of it heavy stuff, and the fields were big. Sellanraa was a sizeable place now, and the women had other things to look to besides making hay; all the cattle to look to, and meals to be got, and all in proper time; butter and cheese to make, and clothes to wash, and baking of bread; mother and daughter working all they could. Isak was not going to have another summer like that; he decided without any fuss that Jensine should come back again if she could be got. Inger, too, had no longer a word against it; she had come to her senses again, and said: "Ay, do as you think best." Ay, Inger was grown reasonable now; 'tis no little thing to come to one's senses again after a spell. Inger was no longer full of heat that must out, no longer full of wild blood to be kept in check, the winter had cooled her; nothing beyond the needful warmth in her now. She was getting stouter, growing fine and stately. A wonderful woman to keep from fading, keep from dying off by degrees; like enough because she had bloomed so late in life. Who can say how things come about? Nothing comes from a single cause, but from many. Was Inger not in the best repute with the smith's wife? What could any smith's wife say against her? With her disfigurement, she had been cheated of her spring, and later, had been set in artificial air to lose six years of her summer; with life still in her, what wonder her autumn gave an errant growth? Inger was better

than blacksmiths' wives — a little damaged, a little warped, but good by nature, clever by nature . . . ay. . . .

Father and son drive down, they come to Brede Olsen's lodging-house and set the horse in a shed. It is evening now. They go in themselves.

Brede Olsen has rented the house; an outbuilding it had been, belonging to the storekeeper, but done up now with two sitting-rooms and two bedrooms; none so bad, and in a good situation. The place is well frequented by coffee-drinkers and folk from round about the village going by the boat.

Brede seems to have been in luck for once, found something suited to him, and he may thank his wife for that. 'Twas Brede's wife had hit on the idea of a coffee-shop and lodging-house, the day she sat selling coffee at the auction at Breidablik; 'twas a pleasant enough thing to be selling something, to feel money in her fingers, ready cash. Since they had come down here they had managed nicely, selling coffee in earnest now, and housing a deal of folk with nowhere else to lay their heads. A blessing to travellers, is Brede's wife. She has a good helper, of course, in Katrine, her daughter, a big girl now and clever at waiting — though that is only for the time, of course; not long before little Katrine must have something better than waiting on folk in her parents' house. But for the present, they are making money fairly well, and that is the main thing. The start had been decidedly favourable, and might have been better if the storekeeper had not run short

of cakes and sweet biscuits to serve with the coffee; here were all the feast-day folk calling for cakes with their coffee, biscuits and cakes! 'Twas a lesson to the storekeeper to lay in a good supply another time.

The family, and Brede himself, live as best they can on their takings. A good many meals are nothing but coffee and stale cakes left over, but it keeps them alive, and gives the children a delicate, sort of refined appearance. 'Tis not every one has cakes with their coffee, say the village folk. Ay, Bredes are doing well, it seems; they even manage to keep a dog, that goes round begging among the customers and gets bits here and there and grows fat on it. A good fat dog about the place is a mighty fine advertisement for a lodging-house; it speaks for good feeding anywhere.

Brede, then, is husband and father in the house, and apart from that position, has got on variously beside. He had been once more installed as Lensmand's assistant and deputy, and had a good deal to do that way for a time. Unfortunately, his daughter Barbro had fallen out with the Lensmand's wife last autumn, about a trifling matter, a mere nothing — indeed, to tell the truth, a flea; and Brede himself is somewhat in disfavour there since. But Brede counts it no great loss, after all; there are other families that find work for him now on purpose to annoy the Lensmand's; he is frequently called upon, for instance, to drive for the doctor, and as for the parsonage, they'd gladly send for Brede every time

there's a pig to be killed, and more — Brede says so himself.

But for all that there are hard times now and again in Brede's house; 'tis not all the family are as fat and flourishing as the dog. Still, Heaven be praised, Brede is not a man to take things much to heart. "Here's the children growing up day by day," says he, though, for that matter, there's always new little ones coming to take their place. The ones that are grown up and out in the world can keep themselves, and send home a bit now and again. There's Barbro married at Maaneland, and Helge out at the herring fishery; they send home something in money or money's worth as often as they can; ay, even Katrine, doing waiting at home, managed, strangely enough, to slip a five-*Krone* note into her father's hand last winter, when things were looking extra bad. "There's a girl for you," said Brede, and never asked her where she'd got the money, or what for. Ay, that was the way! Children with a heart to think of their parents and help them in time of need!

Brede is not altogether pleased with his boy Helge in that respect; he can be heard at times standing in the store with a little group about him, developing his theories as to children and their duty toward their parents. "Look you, now, my boy, Helge; if he smokes tobacco a bit, or takes a dram now and then, I've nothing against that, we've all been young in our time. But 'tis not right of him to go sending one letter home after another and nothing

but words and wishes in. 'Tis not right to set his mother crying. 'Tis the wrong road for a lad. In days gone by, things were different. Children were no sooner grown than they went into service and started sending home a little to help. And quite right, too. Isn't it their father and mother had borne them under their breast first of all, and sweating blood to keep the life in them all their tender years? And then to forget it all!"

It almost seemed as if Helge had heard that speech of his father's, for there came a letter from him after with money in — fifty *Kroner,* no less. And then Bredes had a great time; ay, in their endless extravagance they bought both meat and fish for dinner, and a lamp all hung about with lustres to hang from the ceiling in the best room.

They managed somehow, and what more could they ask? Bredes, they kept alive, lived from hand to mouth, but without great fear. What more could they wish for?

"Here's visitors indeed!" says Brede, showing Isak and Eleseus into the room with the new lamp. "And I'd never thought to see. Isak, you're never going away yourself, and all?"

"Nay, only to the smith's for something, 'tis no more."

"Ho! 'Tis Eleseus, then, going off south again?"

Eleseus is used to hotels; he makes himself at home, hangs up his coat and stick on the wall, and calls for coffee; as for something to eat, his father

has things in a basket. Katrine brings the coffee.

"Pay? I'll not hear of it," says Brede. "I've had many a bite and sup at Sellanraa; and as for Eleseus, I'm in his books already. Don't take it, Katrine." But Eleseus pays all the same, takes out his purse and pays out the money, and twenty *Ore* over; no nonsense about him.

Isak goes across to the smith's, and Eleseus stays where he is.

He says a few words, as in duty bound, to Katrine, but no more than is needed; he would rather talk to her father. No, Eleseus cares nothing for women; has been frightened off by them once, as it were, and takes no interest in them now. Like as not he'd never much inclination that way to speak of, seeing he's so completely out of it all now. A strange man to live in the wilds; a gentleman with thin writer's hands, and the sense of a woman for finery; for sticks and umbrellas and galoshes. Frightened off, and changed, incomprehensibly not a marrying man. Even his upper lip declines to put forth any brutal degree of growth. Yet it might be the lad had started well enough, come of good stock, but been turned thereafter into an artificial atmosphere, and warped, transformed? Had he worked so hard in an office, in a shop, that his whole originality was lost thereby? Ay, maybe 'twas so. Anyway, here he is now, easy and passionless, a little weak, a little heedless, wandering farther and farther off the road. He might envy every soul among his fellows in the wilds, but has not even strength for that.

Katrine is used to jesting with her customers, and asks him teasingly if he is off to see his sweetheart in the south again.

"I've other things to think of," says Eleseus. "I'm out on business — opening up connections."

"No call to be so free with your betters, Katrine," says her father reprovingly. Oh, Brede Olsen is all respect towards Eleseus, mighty respectful for him to be. And well he may, 'tis but wise of him, seeing he owes money up at Storborg, and here's his creditor before him. And Eleseus? Ho, all this deference pleases him, and he is kind and gracious in return; calls Brede "My dear sir," in jest, and goes on that way. He mentions that he has forgotten his umbrella: "Just as we were passing Breidablik, I thought of it; left my umbrella behind."

Brede asks: "You'll be going over to our little store this evening, belike, for a drink?"

Says Eleseus: "Ay, maybe, if 'twas only myself. But I've my father here."

Brede makes himself pleasant, and goes on gossiping: "There's a fellow coming in day after tomorrow that's on his way to America."

"Been home, d'you mean?"

"Ay. He's from up in the village a bit. Been away for ever so many years, and home for the winter. His trunk's come down already by cart — and a mighty fine trunk."

"I've thought of going to America myself once or twice," says Eleseus frankly.

"You?" cries Brede. "Why, there's little need

for the likes of you going that way surely!"

"Well, 'twas not going over to stay for ever I was thinking. But I've been travelling about so many places now, I might just as well make the trip over there."

"Ay, of course, and why not? And a heap of money and means and all, so they say, in America. Here's this fellow I spoke of before; he's paid for more feasting and parties than's easy to count this winter past, and comes in here and says to me, 'Let's have some coffee, a potful, and all the cakes you've got.' Like to see his trunk?"

They went out in the passage to look at the trunk. A wonder to look at on earth, flaming all sides and corners with metal and clasps and binding, and three flaps to hold it down, not to speak of a lock. "Burglar-proof," says Brede, as if he had tried it himself.

They went back into the room, but Eleseus was grown thoughtful. This American from up in the village had outdone him; he was nothing beside such a man. Going out on journeys like any high official; ay, natural enough that Brede should make a fuss of him. Eleseus ordered more coffee, and tried to play the rich man too; ordered cakes with his coffee and gave them to the dog — and all the time feeling worthless and dejected. What was his trunk beside that wonder out there? There it stood, black canvas with the corners all rubbed and worn; a handbag, nothing more — ho, but wait! He would buy a trunk when he got to the towns, a splendid one it should be, only wait!

" 'Tis a pity to feed the dog so," says Brede.

And Eleseus feels better at that, and ready to show off again. " 'Tis a marvel how a beast can get so fat," says he.

One thought leading to another: Eleseus breaks off his talk with Brede and goes out into the shed to look at the horse. And there he takes out a letter from his pocket and opens it. He had put it away at once, never troubling to look what money was in it; he had had letters of that sort from home before, and always a deal of notes inside — something to help him on the way. What was this? A big sheet of grey paper scrawled all over; little Rebecca to her brother Eleseus, and a few words from his mother. What else? Nothing else. No money at all.

His mother wrote that she could not ask his father for more money again now, for there was none too much left of all they had got for the copper mine that time; the money had gone to buy Storborg, and pay for all the goods after, and Eleseus' travelling about. He must try and manage by himself this time, for the money that was left would have to be kept for his brother and sisters, not to leave them all without. And a pleasant journey and your loving mother.

No money.

Eleseus himself had not enough for his fare; he had cleaned out the cash box at Storborg, and that was not much. Oh, but he had been a fool to send that money to the dealers in Bergen on account; no

hurry for that; he might have let it stand over. He ought, of course, to have opened the letter before starting out at all; he might have saved himself that journey down to the village with his miserable trunk and all. And here he was. . . .

His father comes back from the smith's after settling his business there; Jensine was to go back with him next morning. And Jensine, look you, had been nowise contrary and hard to persuade, but saw at once they wanted help at Sellanraa for the summer, and was ready to come. A proper way to do, again.

While his father is talking, Eleseus sits thinking of his own affairs. He shows him the American's trunk, and says: "Only wish I was where that's come from."

And his father answers: "Ay, 'twas none so bad, maybe."

Next morning Isak gets ready to start for home again; has his food, puts in the horse and drives round by the smith's to fetch Jensine and her box. Eleseus stands looking after them as they go; then when they are lost to sight in the woods, he pays his score at the lodging-house again, and something over. "You can leave my trunk here till I come back," he tells Katrine, and off he goes.

Eleseus — going where? Only one place to go; he turns back, going back home again. So he too takes the road up over the hills again, taking care to keep as near his father and Jensine as he can without being seen. Walks on and on. Begin-

ning now to envy every soul of them in the wilds.

'Tis a pity about Eleseus, so changed he is and all.

Is he doing no business at Storborg? Such as it is; nothing to make a fortune out of there, and Eleseus is overmuch out and abroad, making pleasant journeys on business to open up connections, and it costs too much; he does not travel cheaply. "Doesn't do to be mean," says Eleseus, and gives twenty *Ore* over where he might save ten. The business cannot support a man of his tastes, he must get subsidies from home. There's the farm at Storborg, with potatoes and corn and hay enough for the place itself, but all provisions else must come from Sellanraa. Is that all? Sivert must cart up his brother's goods from the steamer all for nothing. And is that all? His mother must get money out of his father to pay for his journeys. But is that all?

The worst is to come.

Eleseus manages his business like a fool. It flatters him to have folk coming up from the village to buy at Storborg, so that he gives them credit as soon as asked; and when this is noised abroad, there come still more of them to buy the same way. The whole thing is going to rack and ruin. Eleseus is an easy man, and lets it go; the store is emptied and the store is filled again. All costs money. And who pays it? His father.

At first, his mother had been a faithful spokesman for him every way. Eleseus was the clever

head of the family; they must help him on and give him a start; then think how cheaply he had got Storborg, and saying straight out what he would give for it! When his father thought it was going wrong somehow with the business, and naught but foolery, she took him up. "How can you stand there and say such things!" Ay, she reproved him for using such words about his son; Isak was forgetting his place, it seemed, to speak so of Eleseus.

For look you, his mother had been out in the world herself; she understood how hard it was for Eleseus to live in the wilds, being used to better things, and accustomed to move in society, and with none of his equals near. He risked too much in his dealings with folk that were none of the soundest; but even so, 'twas not done with any evil intent on his part of ruining his parents, but sheer goodness of heart and noble nature; 'twas his way to help those that were not so fine and grand as himself. Why, wasn't he the only man in those parts to use white handkerchiefs that were always having to be washed? When folk came trustingly to him and asked for credit, if he were to say "No," they might take it amiss, it might seem as if he were not the noble fellow they had thought, after all. Also, he had a certain duty towards his fellows, as the town-bred man, the genius among them all.

Ay, his mother bore all these things in mind.

But his father, never understanding it all in the least, opened her eyes and ears one day and said:

"Look you here. Here's all that is left of the money from that mine."

"That's all?" said she. "And what's come of the rest?"

"Eleseus, he's had the rest."

And she clasped her hands at that and declared it was time Eleseus began to use his wits.

Poor Eleseus, all set on end and frittered away. Better, maybe, if he'd worked on the land all the time, but now he's a man that has learned to write and use letters; no grip in him, no depth. For all that, no pitch-black devil of a man, not in love, not ambitious, hardly nothing at all is Eleseus, not even a bad thing of any great dimensions.

Something unfortunate, ill-fated about this young man, as if something were rotting him from within. That engineer from the town, good man — better perhaps, if he had not discovered the lad in his youth and taken him up to make something out of him; the child had lost his roothold, and suffered thereby. All that he turns to now leads back to something wanting in him, something dark against the light. . . .

Eleseus goes on and on. The two in the cart ahead pass by Storborg. Eleseus goes a long way round, and he too passes by; what was he to do there, at home, at his trading station and store? The two in the cart get to Sellanraa at nightfall; Eleseus is close at their heels. Sees Sivert come out in the yard, all surprised to see Jensine, and the two shake hands and laugh a little; then Sivert takes the horse out and leads it to stable.

Eleseus ventures forward; the pride of the family, he ventures up a little. Not walking up, but stealing up; he comes on Sivert in the stable. "'Tis only me," he says.

"What — you too?" says Sivert, all astonished again.

The two brothers begin talking quietly; about Sivert getting his mother to find some money; a last resource, the money for a journey. Things can't go on this way; Eleseus is weary of it; has been thinking of it a long time now, and he must go tonight; a long journey, to America, and start tonight.

"America?" says Sivert out loud.

"Sh! I've been thinking of it a long time, and you must get her to do as I say; it can't go on like this, and I've been thinking of going for ever so long."

"But America!" says Sivert. "No, don't you do it."

"I'm going. I've settled that. Going back now to catch the boat."

"But you must have something to eat."

"I'm not hungry."

"But rest a bit, then?"

"No."

Sivert is trying to act for the best, and hold his brother back, but Eleseus is determined, ay, for once he is determined. Sivert himself is all taken aback; first of all it was a surprise to see Jensine again, and now here's Eleseus going to leave the place altogether, not to say the world. "What about

Storborg?" says he. "What'll you do with it?"

"Andresen can have it," says Sivert.

"Andresen have it? How d'you mean?"

"Isn't he going to have Leopoldine?"

"Don't know about that. Ay, perhaps he is."

They talk quietly, keep on talking. Sivert thinks it would be best if his father came out and Eleseus could talk to him himself; but "No, no!" whispers Eleseus again; he was never much of a man to face a thing like that, but always must have a go-between.

Says Sivert: "Well, mother, you know how 'tis with her. There'll be no getting any way with her for crying and talking on. She mustn't know."

"No," Eleseus agrees, "she mustn't know."

Sivert goes off, stays away for ages, and comes back with money, a heap of money. "Here, that's all he has; think it'll be enough? Count — he didn't count how much there was."

"What did he say — father?"

"Nay, he didn't say much. Now you must wait a little, and I'll get some more clothes on and go down with you."

"'Tis not worth while; you go and lie down."

"Ho, are you frightened of the dark that I mustn't go away?" says Sivert, trying a moment to be cheerful.

He is away a moment, and comes back dressed, and with his father's food basket over his shoulder. As they go out, there is their father standing outside. "So you're going all that way, seems?" says Isak.

"Ay," answered Eleseus; "but I'll be coming back again."

"I'll not be keeping you now — there's little time," mumbles the old man, and turns away. "Good luck," he croaks out in a strange voice, and goes off all hurriedly.

The two brothers walk down the road; a little way gone, they sit down to eat; Eleseus is hungry, can hardly eat enough. 'Tis a fine spring night, and the black grouse at play on the hilltops; the homely sound makes the emigrant lose courage for a moment. "'Tis a fine night," says he. "You better turn back now, Sivert," says he.

"H'm," says Sivert, and goes on with him.

They pass by Storborg, by Breidablik, and the sound follows them all the way from the hills here and there; 'tis no military music like in the towns, nay, but voices — a proclamation: Spring has come. Then suddenly the first chirp of a bird is heard from a treetop, waking others, and a calling and answering on every side; more than a song, it is a hymn of praise. The emigrant feels home-sick already, maybe, something weak and helpless in him; he is going off to America, and none could be more fitted to go than he.

"You turn back now, Sivert," says he.

"Ay, well," says his brother. "If you'd rather."

They sit down at the edge of the wood, and see the village just below them, the store and the quay, Brede's old lodging-house; some men are moving about by the steamer, getting ready.

" Well, no time to stay sitting here," says Eleseus, getting up again.

" Fancy you going all that way," says Sivert.

And Eleseus answers: " But I'll be coming back again. And I'll have a better sort of trunk that journey."

As they say good-bye, Sivert thrusts something into his brother's hand, a bit of something wrapped in paper. " What is it? " asks Eleseus.

" Don't forget to write often," says Sivert. And so he goes.

Eleseus opens the paper and looks; 'tis the gold piece, twenty-five *Kroner* in gold. " Here, don't! " he calls out. " You mustn't do that! "

Sivert walks on.

Walks on a little, then turns round and sits down again at the edge of the wood. More folk astir now down by the steamer; passengers going on board, Eleseus going on board; the boat pushes off from the side and rows away. And Eleseus is gone to America.

He never came back.

Chapter XII

A NOTABLE procession coming up to Sellanraa; something laughable to look at, maybe, but more than that. Three men with enormous burdens, with sacks hanging down from their shoulders, front and back. Walking one behind the other, and calling to one another with jesting words, but heavily laden. Little Andresen, chief clerk, is head of that procession; indeed, 'tis his procession; he has fitted out himself, and Sivert from Sellanraa, and one other, Fredrik Ström from Breidablik, for the expedition. A notable little man is Andresen; his shoulder is weighed down slantwise on one side, and his jacket pulled all awry at the neck, the way he goes, but he carries his burden on and on.

Storborg and the business Eleseus had left — well, not bought it straight out on the spot, perhaps, 'tis more than Andresen could afford; better afford to wait a bit and get the whole maybe for nothing. Andresen is no fool; he has taken over the place on lease for the meanwhile, and manages the business himself.

Gone through the stock in hand, and found a deal of unsalable truck in Eleseus' store, even to such things as toothbrushes and embroidered table cen-

tres; ay, and stuffed birds on springs that squeaked when you pressed in the right place.

These are the things he has started out with now, going to sell them to the miners on the other side of the hills. He knows from Aronsen's time that miners with money in their pockets will buy anything on earth. Only a pity he had to leave behind six rocking-horses that Eleseus had ordered on his last trip to Bergen.

The caravan turns into the yard at Sellanraa and sets down its load. No long wait here; they drink a mug of milk, and make pretence of trying to sell their wares on the spot, then shoulder their burdens and off again. They are not out for pretence. Off they go, trundling southward through the forest.

They march till noon, rest for a meal and on again till evening. Then they camp and make a fire, lie down, and sleep a while. Sivert sleeps resting on a boulder that he calls an arm-chair. Oh, Sivert knows what he is about; here's the sun been warming that boulder all day, till it's a good place to sit and sleep. His companions are not so wise, and will not take advice; they lie down in the heather, and wake up feeling cold, and sneezing. Then they have breakfast and start off again.

Listening now, for any sound of blasting about; they are hoping to come on the mine, and meet with folk some time that day. The work should have got so far by now; a good way up from the water towards Sellanraa. But never a sound of blasting anywhere. They march till noon, meeting never a

soul; but here and there they come upon holes in the ground, where men have been digging for trial. What can this mean? Means, no doubt, that the ore must be more than commonly rich at the farther end of the tract; they are getting out pure heavy copper, and keeping to that end all the time.

In the afternoon they come upon several more mines, but no miners; they march on till evening, and already they can make out the sea below; marching through a wilderness of deserted mines, and never a sound. 'Tis all beyond understanding, but nothing for it; they must camp and sleep out again that night. They talk the matter over: Can the work have stopped? Should they turn and go back again? "Not a bit of it," says Andresen.

Next morning a man walks into their camp — a pale, haggard man who looks at them frowningly, piercingly. "That you, Andresen?" says the man. It is Aronsen, Aronsen the trader. He does not say "No" to a cup of hot coffee and something to eat with the caravan, and settles down at once. "I saw the smoke of your fire, and came up to see what it was," says he. "I said to myself, 'Sure enough, they're coming to their senses, and starting work again.' And 'twas only you, after all! Where you making for, then?"

"Here."

"What's that you've got with you?"

"Goods."

"Goods?" cries Aronsen. "Coming up here with goods for sale? Who's to buy them? There's

never a soul. They left last Saturday gone."

"Left? Who left?"

"All the lot. Not a soul on the place now. And I've goods enough myself, anyway. A whole store packed full. I'll sell you anything you like."

Oh, Trader Aronsen in difficulties again! The mine has shut down.

They ply him with coffee till he grows calmer, and asks what it all means.

Aronsen shakes his head despairingly. "'Tis beyond understanding, there's no words for it," says he. All had been going so well, and he had been selling goods, and money pouring in; the village round all flourishing, and using the finest meal, and a new schoolhouse, and hanging lamps and town-made boots, and all! Then suddenly their lordships up at the mine take it into their heads that the thing isn't paying, and close down. Not paying? But it paid them before? Wasn't there clean copper there and plain to see at every blasting? 'Twas rank cheating, no less. "And never a thought of what it means to a man like me. Ay, I doubt it's as they say; 'tis that Geissler's at the bottom of it all, same as before. No sooner he'd come up than the work stopped; 'twas as if he'd smelt it out somehow."

"Geissler, is he here, then?"

"Is he not? Ought to be shot, he ought! Comes up one day by the steamer and says to the engineer: 'Well, how's things going?'—'All right, as far as I can see,' says the engineer. But Geissler he just stands there, and asks again: 'Ho, all right,

is it?'—'Ay, as far as I know,' says the engineer. But as true as I'm here, no sooner the post comes up from that same boat Geissler had come by, than there's letter and telegram both to the engineer that the work wasn't paying, and he's to shut down at once."

The members of the expedition look at one another, but the leader, Andresen himself, has not lost courage yet.

"You may just as well turn back and go home again," is Aronsen's advice.

"We're not doing that," says Andresen, and packs up the coffee-pot.

Aronsen stares at the three of them in turn. "You're mad, then," says he.

Look you, Andresen he cares little now for what his master that was can say; he's master himself now, leader of an expedition equipped at his own expense for a journey to distant parts; 'twould lose him his prestige to turn back now where he is.

"Well, where will you go?" asks Aronsen irritably.

"Can't say," answers Andresen. But he's a notion of his own all the same, no doubt; thinking, maybe, of the natives, and coming down into the district three men strong, with glass beads and finger rings. "We'll be getting on," says he to the rest.

Now, Aronsen had thought like enough to go farther up that morning, seeing he'd come so far, wanting, maybe, to see if all the place was quite deserted, if it could be true every man on the place was gone.

But seeing these pedlar-folk so set on going on, it hinders him, and he tells them again and again they're mad to try. Aronsen is furious himself, marches down in front of the caravan, turning round and shouting at them, barking at them, trying to keep them out of his district. And so they come down to the huts in the mining centre.

A little town of huts, but empty and desolate. Most of the tools and implements are housed under cover, but poles and planks, broken carts and cases and barrels, lie all about in disorder; here and there a notice on a door declares "No admittance."

"There you are," cries Aronsen. "What did I say? Not a soul in the place." And he threatens the caravan with disaster — he will send for the Lensmand; anyway, he's going to follow them every step now, and if he can catch them at any unlawful trading 'tis penal servitude and slavery, no mistake!

All at once somebody calls out for Sivert. The place is not altogether dead, after all, not utterly deserted; here is a man standing beckoning at the corner of a house. Sivert trundles over with his load, and sees at once who it is — Geissler.

"Funny meeting you here," says Geissler. His face is red and flourishing, but his eyes apparently cannot stand the glare of spring, he is wearing smoked glasses. He talks as brilliantly as ever. "Luckiest thing in the world," says he. "Save me going all the way up to Sellanraa; and I've a deal to look after. How many settlers are there in the *Almenning* now?"

"Ten."

"Ten new holdings. I'll agree. I'm satisfied. But 'tis two-and-thirty-thousand men of your father's stamp the country wants. Ay, that's what I say, and I mean it; I've reckoned it out."

"Sivert, are you coming on?" The caravan is waiting.

Geissler hears, and calls back sharply: "No."

"I'll come on after," calls Sivert, and sets down his load.

The two men sit down and talk. Geissler is in the right mood today; the spirit moves him, and he talks all the time, only pausing when Sivert puts in a word or so in answer, and then going on again. "A mighty lucky thing — can't help saying it. Everything turned out just as I wanted all the way up, and now meeting you here and saving all the journey to Sellanraa. All well at home, what?"

"All well, and thank you kindly."

"Got up that hayloft yet, over the cowshed?"

"Ay, 'tis done."

"Well, well — I've a heap of things to look to, almost more than I can manage. Look at where we're sitting now, for instance. What d'you say to that, Sivert man? Ruined city, eh? Men gone about to build it all against their nature and well-being. Properly speaking, it's all my fault from the start — that is to say, I'm a humble agent in the workings of fate. It all began when your father picked up some bits of stone up in the hills, and gave you to play with when you were a child. That was

how it started. I knew well enough those bits of stone were worth exactly as much as men would give for them, no more; well and good, I set a price on them myself, and bought them. Then the stones passed from hand to hand, and did no end of damage. Time went on. And now, a few days ago, I came up here again, and what for, d'you think? To buy those stones back again!"

Geissler stops for a moment, and looks at Sivert. Then suddenly he glances at the sack, and asks: "What's that you're carrying?"

"Goods," says Sivert. "We're taking them down to the village."

Geissler does not seem interested in the answer; has not even heard it, like as not. He goes on:

"Buy them back again — yes. Last time, I let my son manage the deal; he sold them then. Young fellow about your own age, that's all about him. He's the lightning in the family, I'm more a sort of fog. Know what's the right thing to do, but don't do it. But he's the lightning — and he's entered the service of industry for the time being. 'Twas he sold for me last time. I'm something and he's not, he's only the lightning; quick to act, modern type. But the lightning by itself's a barren thing. Look at you folk at Sellanraa, now; looking up at blue peaks every day of your lives; no new-fangled inventions about that, but fjeld and rocky peaks, rooted deep in the past — but you've them for companionship. There you are, living in touch with heaven and earth, one with them, one with all these wide,

deep-rooted things. No need of a sword in your hands, you go through life bareheaded, barehanded, in the midst of a great kindliness. Look, Nature's there, for you and yours to have and enjoy. Man and Nature don't bombard each other, but agree; they don't compete, race one against the other, but go together. There's you Sellanraa folk, in all this, living there. Fjeld and forest, moors and meadow, and sky and stars — oh, 'tis not poor and sparingly counted out, but without measure. Listen to me, Sivert: you be content! You've everything to live on, everything to live for, everything to believe in; being born and bringing forth, you are the needful on earth. 'Tis not all that are so, but you are so; needful on earth. 'Tis you that maintain life. Generation to generation, breeding ever anew; and when you die, the new stock goes on. That's the meaning of eternal life. What do you get out of it? An existence innocently and properly set towards all. What you get out of it? Nothing can put you under orders and lord it over you Sellanraa folk, you've peace and authority and this great kindliness all round. That's what you get for it. You lie at a mother's breast and suck, and play with a mother's warm hand. There's your father now, he's one of the two-and-thirty thousand. What's to be said of many another? I'm something, I'm the fog, as it were, here and there, floating around, sometimes coming like rain on dry ground. But the others? There's my son, the lightning that's nothing in itself, a flash of barrenness; he can act.

My son, ay, he's the modern type, a man of our time; he believes honestly enough all the age has taught him, all the Jew and the Yankee have taught him; I shake my head at it all. But there's nothing mythical about me; 'tis only in the family, so to speak, that I'm like a fog. Sit there shaking my head. Tell the truth — I've not the power of doing things and not regretting it. If I had, I could be lightning myself. Now I'm a fog."

Suddenly Geissler seems to recollect himself, and asks: "Got up that hayloft yet, above the cowshed?"

"Ay, that's done. And father's put up a new house."

"New house?"

"'Tis in case any one should come, he says — in case Geissler he should happen to come along."

Geissler thinks over this, and takes his decision: "Well, then, I'd better come. Yes, I'll come; you can tell your father that. But I've a heap of things to look to. Came up here and told the engineer to let his people in Sweden know I was ready to buy. And we'd see what happened. All the same to me, no hurry. You ought to have seen that engineer — here he's been going about and keeping it all up with men and horses and money and machines and any amount of fuss; thought it was all right, knew no better. The more bits of stone he can turn into money, the better; he thinks he's doing something clever and deserving, bringing money to the place, to the country, and everything nearing disas-

ter more and more, and he's none the wiser. 'Tis not money the country wants, there's more than enough of it already; 'tis men like your father there's not enough of. Ay, turning the means to an end in itself and being proud of it! They're mad, diseased; they don't work, they know nothing of the plough, only the dice. Mighty deserving of them, isn't it, working and wasting themselves to nothing in their own mad way. Look at them — staking everything, aren't they? There's but this much wrong with it all; they forget that gambling isn't courage, 'tis not even foolhardy courage, 'tis a horror. D'you know what gambling is? 'Tis fear, with the sweat on your brow, that's what it is. What's wrong with them is, they won't keep pace with life, but want to go faster — race on, tear on ahead, driving themselves into life itself like wedges. And then the flanks of them say: here, stop, there's something breaking, find a remedy; stop, say the flanks! And then life crushes them, politely but firmly crushes them. And then they set to complaining about life, raging against life! Each to his own taste; some may have ground to complain, others not, but there's none should rage against life. Not be stern and strict and just with life, but be merciful to it, and take its part; only think of the gamblers life has to bear with!"

Geissler recollects himself again, and says: "Well, all that's as it may be; leave it!" He is evidently tired, beginning to breathe in little gasps. "Going down?" says he.

"Ay."

"There's no hurry. You owe me a long walk over the hills, Sivert man, remember that? I remember it all. I remember from the time I was a year and a half; stood leaning down from the barn bridge at Garmo, and noticed a smell. I can smell it again now. But all that's as it may be, that too; but we might have done that trip over the hills now if you hadn't got that sack. What's in it?"

"Goods. 'Tis Andresen is going to sell them."

"Well, then, I'm a man that knows what's the right thing to do, but doesn't do it," says Geissler. "I'm the fog. Now perhaps I'll buy that mine back again one of these days, it's not impossible; but if I do, it wouldn't be to go about staring up at the sky and saying, 'Aerial railway! South America!' No, leave that to the gamblers. Folk hereabout say I must be the devil himself because I knew beforehand this was going to break up. But there's nothing mystical about me, 'tis simple enough. The new copper mines in Montana, that's all. The Yankees are smarter than we are at that game; they are cutting us to death in South America — our ore here's too poor. My son's the lightning; he got the news, and I came floating up here. Simple, isn't it? I beat those fellows in Sweden by a few hours, that's all."

Geissler is short of breath again; he gets on his feet, and says: "If you're going down, let's get along."

They go on down together, Geissler dragging be-

hind, all tired out. The caravan has stopped at the quay, and Fredrik Ström, cheerful as ever, is poking fun at Aronsen: "I'm clean out of tobacco; got any tobacco, what?"

"I'll give you tobacco," said Aronsen threateningly.

Fredrik laughs, and says comfortingly: "Nay, you've no call to take it all heavy-like and sad, Aronsen. We're just going to sell these things here before your eyes, and then we'll be off home again."

"Get away and wash your dirty mouth," says Aronsen furiously.

"Ha ha ha! Nay, you've no call to dance about that way; keep still and look like a picture!"

Geissler is tired, tired out, even his smoked glasses do not help him now, his eyes keep closing in the glare.

"Good-bye, Sivert man," says he all at once. "No, I can't get up to Sellanraa this time, after all; tell your father. I've a heap of things to see to. But I'll come later on — say that. . . ."

Aronsen spits after him, and says: "Ought to be shot!"

For three days the caravan peddles its wares, selling out the contents of the sacks, and getting good prices. It was a brilliant piece of business. The village folk were still well supplied with money after the downfall of the mine, and were excellently in form in the way of spending; those stuffed birds on springs were the very thing they wanted; they set

them up on chests of drawers in their parlours, and also bought nice paper-knives, the very thing for cutting the leaves of an almanac. Aronsen was furious. "Just as if I hadn't things every bit as good in my store," said he."

Trader Aronsen was in a sorry way; he had made up his mind to keep with these pedlars and their sacks, watching them all the time; but they went separate ways about the village, each for himself, and Aronsen almost tore himself to pieces trying to follow all at once. First he gave up Fredrik Ström, who was quickest at saying unpleasant things; then Sivert, because he never said a word, but went on selling; at last he stuck to following his former clerk, and trying to set folk against him wherever he went in. Oh, but Andresen knew his master that was — knew him of old, and how little he knew of business and unlawful trading.

"Ho, you mean to say English thread's not prohibited?" said Aronsen, looking wise.

"I know it is," answered Andresen. "But I'm not carrying any this way; I can sell that elsewhere. I haven't a reel in my pack; look for yourself, if you like."

"That's as it may be," says Aronsen. "Anyway, I know what's forbidden, and I've shown you, so don't try to teach me."

Aronsen stood it for a whole day, then he gave up Andresen, too, and went home. The pedlars had no one to watch them after that.

And then things began to go swimmingly. It was

in the day when womenfolk used to wear loose plaits in their hair; and Andresen, he was the man to sell loose plaits. Ay, at a pinch he could sell fair plaits to dark girls, and be sorry he'd nothing lighter; no grey plaits, for instance, for that was the finest of all. And every evening the three young salesmen met at an appointed place and went over the day's trade, each borrowing from another anything he'd sold out of; and Andresen would sit down, often as not, and take out a file and file away the German trade-mark from a sportsman's whistle, or rub out "Faber" on the pens and pencils. Andresen was a trump, and always had been.

Sivert, on the other hand, was rather a disappointment. Not that he was any way slack, and failed to sell his goods —'twas he, indeed, sold most — but he did not get enough for them. "You don't put in enough patter with it," said Andresen.

No, Sivert was no hand at reeling off a lot of talk; he was a fieldworker, sure of what he said, and speaking calmly when he spoke at all. What was there to talk about here? Also, Sivert was anxious to be done with it and get back home, there was work to do in the fields.

"'Tis that Jensine's calling him," Fredrik Ström explained. Fredrik, himself, by the way, had work on his own fields to be done that spring, and little time to waste; but for all that, he must look in on Aronsen the last day and get up an argument with him. "I'll sell him the empty sacks," said he.

Andresen and Sivert stayed outside while he went

in. They heard grand goings-on inside the store. both talking at once, and Fredrik setting up a laugh now and again; then Aronsen threw open the door and showed his visitor out. Oh, but Fredrik didn't come out — no, he took his time, and talked a lot more. The last thing they heard from outside was Fredrik trying to sell Aronsen a lot of rocking-horses.

Then the caravan went home again — three young men full of life and health. They marched and sang, slept a few hours in the open, and went on again. When they got back to Sellanraa on the Monday, Isak had begun sowing. The weather was right for it; the air moist, with the sun peeping out now and again, and a mighty rainbow strung right across the heavens.

The caravan broke up — *Farvel, Farvel.* . . .

Isak at his sowing; a stump of a man, a barge of a man to look at, nothing more. Clad in home-spun — wool from his own sheep, boots from the hide of his own cows and calves. Sowing — and he walks religiously bareheaded to that work; his head is bald just at the very top, but all the rest of him shamefully hairy; a fan, a wheel of hair and beard, stands out from his face. 'Tis Isak, the Margrave.

'Twas rarely he knew the day of the month — what need had he of that? He had no bills to be met on a certain date; the marks on his almanac were to show the time when each of the cows should bear. But he knew St. Olaf's Day in the autumn,

that by then his hay must be in, and he knew Candlemas in spring, and that three weeks after then the bears came out of their winter quarters; all seed must be in the earth by then. He knew what was needful.

A tiller of the ground, body and soul; a worker on the land without respite. A ghost risen out of the past to point the future, a man from the earliest days of cultivation, a settler in the wilds, nine hundred years old, and, withal, a man of the day.

Nay, there was nothing left to him now of the copper mine and its riches — the money had vanished into air. And who had anything left of all that wealth when the working stopped, and the hills lay dead and deserted? But the *Almenning* was there still, and ten new holdings on that land, beckoning a hundred more.

Nothing growing there? All things growing there; men and beasts and fruit of the soil. Isak sowing his corn. The evening sunlight falls on the corn that flashes out in an arc from his hand, and falls like a dropping of gold to the ground. Here comes Sivert to the harrowing; after that the roller, and then the harrow again. Forest and field look on. All is majesty and power — a sequence and purpose of things.

Kling . . . eling . . . say the cow bells far up on the hillside, coming nearer and nearer; the cattle are coming home for the night. Fifteen head of them, and five-and-forty sheep and goats besides; threescore in all. There go the women out with

their milk-pails, carried on yokes from the shoulder: Leopoldine, Jensine, and little Rebecca. All three barefooted. The Margravine, Inger herself, is not with them; she is indoors preparing the meal. Tall and stately, as she moves about her house, a Vestal tending the fire of a kitchen stove. Inger has made her stormy voyage, 'tis true, has lived in a city a while, but now she is home; the world is wide, swarming with tiny specks — Inger has been one of them. All but nothing in all humanity, only one speck.

Then comes the evening.

Knut Hamsun

by

W. W. Worster

Knut Hamsun[1]
By W. W. Worster

KNUT HAMSUN is now sixty. For years past he has been regarded as the greatest of living Norwegian writers, but he is still little known in England. One or two attempts have been made previously to introduce Hamsun's work into this country, but it was not until this year, with the publication of *Growth of the Soil,* that he achieved any real success, or became at all generally known, among English readers.

Growth of the Soil (Markens Gröde) is Hamsun's latest work. Its reception here was one of immediate and unstinted appreciation, such as is rarely accorded to a translated work by an alien author practically unknown even to the critics. A noticeable feature was the frankness with which experienced bookmen laid aside stock phrases, and dealt with this book as in response to a strong personal appeal. To the reviewer, aged with much knowledge, hardened by much handling of mediocrity, it is a relief to meet with a book that can and must be dealt with so.

Those readers are, perhaps, most fortunate who

[1] Reprinted by permission from *The Fortnightly Review,* December, 1920.

come upon such a book as this without foretaste or preparation. To the mind under spell of an æsthetic or emotional appeal, the steps that went to make it, the stages whereby the author passed, are as irrelevant as the logarithms that went to build an aeroplane. Yet it is only by knowledge of such steps that the achievement can be fully understood.

Growth of the Soil is very far indeed from Hamsun's earliest beginnings: far even from the books of his early middle period, which made his name. It is the life story of a man in the wilds, the genesis and gradual development of a homestead, the unit of humanity, in the untilled, uncleared tracts that still remain in the Norwegian Highlands. It is an epic of earth; the history of a microcosm. Its dominant note is one of patient strength and simplicity; the mainstay of its working is the tacit, stern, yet loving alliance between Nature and the Man who faces her himself, trusting to himself and her for the physical means of life, and the spiritual contentment with life which she must grant if he be worthy. Modern man faces Nature only by proxy, or as proxy, through others or for others, and the intimacy is lost. In the wilds the contact is direct and immediate; it is the foothold upon earth, the touch of the soil itself, that gives strength.

The story is epic in its magnitude, in its calm, steady progress and unhurrying rhythm, in its vast and intimate humanity. The author looks upon his characters with a great, all-tolerant sympathy, aloof yet kindly, as a god. A more objective work of

fiction it would be hard to find — certainly in what used to be called " the neurasthenic North."

And this from the pen of the man who wrote *Sult, Mysterier,* and *Pan.*

Hamsun's early work was subjective in the extreme; so much so, indeed, as almost to lie outside the limits of æsthetic composition. As a boy he wrote verse under difficulties — he was born in Gudbrandsdalen, but came as a child to Bodö in Lofoten, and worked with a shoemaker there for some years, saving up money for the publication of his juvenile efforts. He had little education to speak of, and after a period of varying casual occupations, mostly of the humblest sort, he came to Christiania with the object of studying there, but failed to make his way. Twice he essayed his fortune in America, but without success. For three years he worked as a fisherman on the Newfoundland Banks.

His Nordland origin is in itself significant; it means an environment of month-long nights and concentrated summers, in which all feelings are intensified, and love and dread and gratitude and longing are nearer and deeper than in milder and more temperate regions, where elemental opposites are, as it were, reciprocally diluted.

In 1890, at the age of thirty, Hamsun attracted attention by the publication of *Sult* (Hunger). *Sult* is a record of weeks of starvation in a city; the semi-delirious confession of a man whose physical and mental faculties have slipped beyond control. He

speaks and acts irrationally, and knows it, watches himself at his mental antics and takes himself to task for the same. And he asks himself: Is it a sign of madness?

It might seem so. The extraordinary associations, the weird fancies and bizarre impulses that are here laid bare give an air of convincing verisimilitude to the supposed confessions of a starving journalist. But, as a matter of fact, Hamsun has no need of extraneous influences to invest his characters with originality. Starving or fed, they can be equally erratic. This is seen in his next book, *Mysterier.*

Here we have actions and reactions as fantastic as in *Sult,* though the hero has here no such excuse as in the former case. The "mysteries," or mystifications, of Nagel, a stranger who comes, for no particular reason apparent, to stay in a little Norwegian town, arise entirely out of Nagel's own personality.

Mysterier is one of the most exasperating books that a publisher's reader, or a conscientious reviewer, could be given to deal with. An analysis of the principal character is a most baffling task. One is tempted to call him mad, and have done with it. But, as a matter of fact, he is uncompromisingly, unrestrainedly human; he goes about constantly saying and doing things that we, ordinary and respectable people, are trained and accustomed to refrain from saying or doing at all. He has the self-consciousness of a sensitive child; he is for ever think-

ing of what people think of him, and trying to create an impression. Then, with a paradoxical sincerity, he confesses that the motive of this or that action *was* simply to create an impression, and thereby destroys the impression. Sometimes he caps this by wilfully letting it appear that the double move was carefully designed to produce the reverse impression of the first — until the person concerned is utterly bewildered, and the reader likewise.

Mysterier appeared in 1893. In the following year Hamsun astonished his critics with two books, *Ny Jord* (New Ground) and *Redaktör Lynge,* both equally unlike his previous work. With these he passes at a bound from one-man stories, portrait studies of eccentric characters in a remote or restricted environment, to group subjects, chosen from centres of life and culture in Christiania. *Redaktör Lynge — redaktör,* of course, means "editor"— deals largely with political manœuvres and intrigues, the bitter controversial politics of Norway prior to the dissolution of the Union with Sweden. *Ny Jord* gives an unflattering picture of the academic, literary, and artistic youth of the capital, idlers for the most part, arrogant, unscrupulous, self-important, and full of disdain for the mere citizens and merchants whose simple honesty and kindliness are laughed at or exploited by the newly dominant representatives of culture.

Both these books are technically superior to the first two, inasmuch as they show mastery of a more difficult form. But their appeal is not so great;

there is lacking a something that might be inspiration, personal sympathy — some indefinable essential that the author himself has taught us to expect. They are less *hamsunsk* than most of Hamsun's work. Hamsun is at his best among the scenes and characters he loves; tenderness and sympathy make up so great a part of his charm that he is hardly recognizable in surroundings or society uncongenial to himself.

It would almost seem as if he realized something of this. For in his next work he turns from the capital to the Nordland coast, reverting also, in some degree, to the subjective, keenly sensitive manner of *Sult,* though now with more restraint and concentration.

Pan (1894) is probably Hamsun's best-known work. It is a love-story, but of an extraordinary type, and is, moreover, important from the fact that we are here introduced to some of the characters and types that are destined to reappear again and again in his later works.

Nagel, the exasperating irresponsible of *Mysterier,* is at his maddest in his behaviour towards the woman he loves. It is natural that this should be so. When a man is intoxicated his essential qualities are emphasized. If he have wit, he will be witty; if a brutal nature, he will be a brute; if he be of a melancholy temper, he will be disposed to sit upon the ground and tell sad stories of the death of kings.

We see this in *Pan.* The love-making of the hero

is characterized by the same irrational impulses, the same extravagant actions, as in *Sult* and *Mysterier*. But they are now less frequent and less involved. The book as a whole is toned down, so to speak, from the bewildering tangle of unrestraint in the first two. There is quite sufficient of the erratic and unusual in the character of Glahn, the hero, but the tone is more subdued. The madcap youth of genius has realized that the world looks frigidly at its vagaries, and the secretly proud " *au moins* je suis autre "— more a boast than a confession — gives place to a wistful, apologetic admission of the difference as a fault. Here already we have something of that resignation which comes later to its fulness in the story of the Wanderer with the Mute.

The love-story in *Pan* takes the form of a conflict; it is one of those battles between the sexes, duels of wit and *esprit,* such as one finds in the plays of Marivaux. But Hamsun sets his battle in the sign of the heart, not of the head; it is a *marivaudage* of feeling, none the less deep for its erratic utterance. Moreover, the scene is laid, not in salons and ante-chambers, but in a landscape such as Hamsun loves, the forest-clad hills above a little fishing village, between the *höifjeld* and the sea. And interwoven with the story, like an eerie breathing from the dark of woods at dusk and dawn, is the haunting presence of Iselin, *la belle dame sans merci.*

Otto Weininger, the author of *Sex and Character,* said of *Pan* that it was " perhaps the most beautiful novel ever written." Weininger, of course, was an

extremist, and few would accept his judgment without reserve. It is doubtful whether any writer nowadays would venture to make such a claim for any book at all.

Pan is a book that offends against all sorts of rules; as a literary product it is eminently calculated to elicit, especially in England, the Olympian "this will never do." To begin with, it is not so much a novel as a *novelle* — a form of art little cultivated in this country, but which lends itself excellently to delicate artistic handling, and the creation of that subtle influence which Hamsun's countrymen call *stemning,* poorly rendered by the English "atmosphere." The epilogue is disproportionately long; the portion written as by another hand is all too recognizably in the style of the rest. And with all his chivalrous sacrifice and violent end, Glahn is at best a quixotic hero. Men, as men, would think him rather a fool, and women, as women, might flush at the thought of a cavalier so embarrassingly unrestrained. He is not to be idolized as a cinema star, or the literary gymnastic hero of a perennial Earl's Court Exhibition set to music on the stage. He could not be truthfully portrayed on a flamboyant wrapper as at all seductively masculine. In a word, he is neither a man's man nor a woman's man. But he is a human being, keenly susceptible to influence which most of us have felt in some degree.

Closely allied to *Pan* is *Victoria,* likewise a story of conflict between two lovers. The actual plot can

only be described as hackneyed. Girl and boy, the rich man's daughter and the poor man's son, playmates in youth, then separated by the barriers of social standing — few but the most hardened of "best-sellers" catering for semi-detached suburbia would venture nowadays to handle such a theme. Yet Hamsun dares, and so insistently unlike all else is the impress of his personality that the mechanical structure of the story is forgotten. It is interspersed with irrelevant fancies, visions and imaginings, a chain of tied notes heard as an undertone through the action on the surface. The effect is that of something straining towards an impossible realization; a beating of wings in the void; a striving for utterance of things beyond speech.

Victoria is the swan-song of Hamsun's subjective period. Already, in the three plays which appeared during the years immediately following *Pan,* he faces the merciless law of change; the unrelenting "forward" which means leaving loved things behind. Kareno, student of life, begins his career in resolute opposition to the old men, the established authorities who stand for compromise and resignation. For twenty years he remains obstinately faithful to his creed, that the old men must step aside or be thrust aside, to make way for the youth that will be served. "What has age that youth has not? Experience. Experience, in all its poor and withered nakedness. And what use is their experience to us, who must make our own in every single happening of life?" In *Aftenröde,* the "Sunset"

of the trilogy, Kareno himself deserts the cause of youth, and allies himself to the party in power. And the final scene shows him telling a story to a child: "There was once a man who never would give way. . . ."

The madness of *Sult* is excused as being delirium, due to physical suffering. Nagel, in *Mysterier,* is shown as a fool, an eccentric intolerable in ordinary society, though he is disconcertingly human, paradoxically sane. Glahn, in *Pan,* apologizes for his uncouth straightforwardness by confessing that he is more at home in the woods, where he can say and do what he pleases without offence. Johannes, in *Victoria,* is of humble birth, which counts in extenuation of his unmannerly frankness in early years. Later he becomes a poet, and as such is exempt in some degree from the conventional restraint imposed on those who aspire to polite society. All these well-chosen characters are made to serve the author's purpose as channels for poetic utterance that might otherwise seem irrelevant. The extent to which this is done may be seen from the way in which Hamsun lets a character in one book enter upon a theme which later becomes the subject of an independent work by the author himself. Thus Glahn is haunted by visions of Diderik and Iselin; Johannes writes fragments supposed to be spoken by one Vendt the Monk. Five years after *Victoria,* Hamsun gives us the romantic drama of *Munken Vendt,* in which Diderik and Iselin appear.

Throughout these early works, Hamsun is striv-

ing to find expression for his own sensitive personality; a form and degree of expression sufficient to relieve his own tension of feeling, without fusing the medium; adequate to his own needs, yet understandable and tolerable to ordinary human beings; to the readers of books. The process, in effect, is simply this: Hamsun is a poet, with a poet's deep and unusual feeling, and a poet's need of utterance. To gain a hearing, he chooses figures whom he can conveniently represent as fools. Secretly, he loves them, for they are himself. But to the world he can present them with a polite apology, a plea for kindly indulgence.

It is not infrequent in literature to find the wisest and most poignant utterances thus laid in the mouths of poor men clad in motley. Some of the most daring things in Shakespeare, the newest heresies of the Renaissance, are voiced by irresponsibles. Of all dramatic figures, that of the fool is most suited to the expression of concentrated feeling. There is an arresting question in a play of recent years, which runs something like this: "Do you think that the things people make fools of themselves about are any less real and true than the things they behave sensibly about?"

Most of us have at some time or another felt that uncomfortable, almost indecently denuding question which comes to us at rare moments from the stage where some great drama is being played: What is higher, what is more real: this, or the life we live? In that sudden flash, the matters of today's and to-

morrow's reality in our minds appear as vulgar trifles, things of which we are ashamed. The feeling lasts but a moment; for a moment we have been something higher than ourselves, in the mere desire so to be. Then we fall back to ourselves once more, to the lower levels upon which alone we can exist. And yet it is by such potentials that we judge the highest art; by its power to give us, if only for a moment, something of that which the divinity of our aspiring minds finds wanting in the confines of reality.

The richness of this quality is one of the most endearing things in Hamsun's characters. Their sensitiveness is a thing we have been trained, for self-defence, to repress. It is well for us, no doubt, that this is so. But we are grateful for their showing that such things *are,* as we are grateful for Kensington Gardens who cannot live where trees are everywhere. The figures Hamsun sets before us as confessedly unsuited to the realities of life, his vagabonds, his failures, his fools, have power at times to make us question whether our world of comfort, luxury, success, is what we thought; if it were not well lost in exchange for the power to *feel* as they.

It has been said that life is a comedy to those who think, a tragedy to those who feel. Humanly speaking, it is one of the greatest merits of Hamsun's work that he shows otherwise. His attitude towards life is throughout one of feeling, yet he makes of life no tragedy, but a beautiful story.

"I will be young until I die," says Kareno in *Aftenröde*. The words are not so much a challenge to fate as a denial of fact; he is not fighting, only refusing to acknowledge the power that is already hard upon him.

Kareno is an *intellectual* character. He is a philosopher, a man whose perceptions and activity lie predominantly in the sphere of thought, not of feeling. His attempt to carry the fire of youth beyond the grave of youth ends in disaster; an unnecessary *débâcle* due to his gratuitously attempting the impossible.

Hamsun's poet-personality, the spirit we have seen striving for expression through the figures of Nagel, Glahn, Johannes, and the rest, is a creature of *feeling*. And here the development proceeds on altogether different lines. The emotion which fails to find adequate outlet, even in such works as *Sult, Mysterier, Victoria,* and *Pan,* might well seem more of a peril than the quixotic stubbornness of Kareno's philosophy. Such a flood, in its tempestuous unrest, might seem to threaten destruction, or at best the vain dispersal of its own power into chaos. But by some rare guidance it is led, after the storm of *Munken Vendt,* into channels of beneficent fertility.

In 1904, after an interval of short stories, letters of travel, and poems, came the story entitled *Sværmere*. The word means "Moths." It also stands for something else; something for which we English, as a sensible people, have no word. Something pleasantly futile, deliciously unprofitable —

foolish lovers, hovering like moths about a lamp.

But there is more than this that is untranslatable in the title. *As* a title it suggests an attitude of gentleness, tenderness, sympathy, toward whomsoever it describes. It is a new note in Hamsun; the opening of a new *motif*.

The main thread of the story bears a certain similarity to that of *Mysterier, Victoria,* and *Pan,* being a love affair of mazy windings, a tangled skein of loves-me-loves-me-not. But it is pure comedy throughout. Rolandsen, the telegraph operator in love with Elsie Mack, is no poet; he has not even any pretensions to education or social standing. He is a cheerful, riotous "blade," who sports with the girls of the village, gets drunk at times, and serenades the parson's wife at night with his guitar. *Sværmere* is the slightest of little stories in itself, but full of delightful vagaries and the most winning humour.

The story of *Benoni,* with its continuation *Rosa,* is in like vein; a tenderly humorous portrayal of love below stairs, the principal characters being chosen from the class who appear as supers in *Pan;* subjects or retainers of the all-powerful Trader Mack. It is as if the sub-plots in one of Shakespeare's plays had been taken out for separate presentment, and the clown promoted to be hero in a play of his own. The cast is increased, the *milieu* lightly drawn in *Pan* is now shown more comprehensively and in detail, making us gradually acquainted with a whole little community, a village world, knowing little of any

world beyond, and forming a microcosm in itself.

Hamsun has returned, as it were, to the scene of his passionate youth, but in altered guise. He plays no part himself now, but is an onlooker, a stander-by, chronicling, as from a cloistered aloofness, yet with kindly wisdom always, the little things that matter in the lives of those around him. Wisdom and kindliness, sympathy and humour and understanding, these are the dominant notes of the new phase. *Sværmere* ends happily — for it is a story of other people's lives. So also with Benoni and Rosa at the last. And so surely has the author established his foothold on the new ground that he can even bring in Edvarda, the " Iselin " figure from *Pan,* once more, thus linking up his brave and lusty comedies of middle age with the romantic tragedies of his youth, making a comprehensive pageant-play of large-hearted humanity.

Meantime, the effect upon himself is seen — and avowed. Between *Sværmere* and *Benoni* comes the frankly first-personal narrative of a vagabond who describes himself, upon interrogation, as " Knut Pedersen "— which is two-thirds of Knut Pedersen Hamsund — and hailing from Nordland — which embraces Lofoten.

It does not need any showing of paper, however, to establish the identity of Knut Pedersen, vagabond, with the author of *Pan.* The opening words of the book (" Under Höststjærnen ") are enough. " Indian summer, mild and warm . . . it is many years now since I knew such peace. Twenty or thirty

years maybe — or maybe it was in another life. But I have felt it some time, surely, since I go about now humming a little tune; go about rejoicing, loving every straw and every stone, and feeling as if they cared for me in return. . . ."

This is the Hamsun of *Pan*. But Hamsun now is a greater soul than in the days when Glahn, the solitary dweller in the woods, picked up a broken twig from the ground and held it lovingly, because it looked poor and forsaken; or thanked the hillock of stone outside his hut because it stood there faithfully, as a friend that waited his return. He is stronger now, but no less delicate; he loves not Nature less, but the world more. He has learned to love his fellow-men. Knut Pedersen, vagabond, wanders about the country with his tramp-companions, Grindhusen, the painter who can ditch and delve at a pinch, or Falkenberg, farm-labourer in harvest-time, and piano-tuner where pianos are. Here is brave comradeship, the sharing of adventures, the ready wit of jovial vagrants. The book is a harmless picaresque, a *geste* of innocent rogue-errantry; its place is with *Lavengro* and *The Cloister and the Hearth,* in that ancient, endless order of tales which link up age with age and land with land in the unaltering, unfrontiered fellowship of the road that kept the spirit of poetry alive through the Dark Ages.

The vagabond from Nordland has his own adventures, his *bonnes fortunes*. There is a touch of Sterne about the book; not the exaggerated super-

Sterne of Tristram Shandy, with eighteenth-century-futurist blanks and marbled pages, but the fluent, casual, follow-your-fancy Sterne of the *Sentimental Journey*. Yet the vagabond himself is unobtrusive, ready to step back and be a chronicler the moment other figures enter into constellation. He moves among youth, himself no longer young, and among gentlefolk, as one making no claim to equal rank.

Both these features are accentuated further in the story of the Wanderer with the Mute. It is a continuation of *Under Höststjærnen,* and forms the culmination, the acquiescent close, of the self-expressional series that began with *Sult*. The discords of tortured loveliness are now resolved into an ultimate harmony of comely resignation and rich content. "A Wanderer may come to fifty years; he plays more softly then. Plays with muted strings." This is the keynote of the book. The Wanderer is no longer young; it is for youth to make the stories old men tell. Tragedy is reserved for those of high estate; a wanderer in corduroy, "such as labourers wear here in the south," can tell the story of his chatelaine and her lovers with the self-repression of a humbler Henry Esmond, winning nothing for himself even at the last, yet feeling he is still in Nature's debt.

Hamsun's next work is *Den Siste Glæde* (literally "The Last Joy"). The title as it stands is expressive. The substantive is "joy"— but it is so qualified by the preceding "last," a word of overwhelming influence in any combination, that the total

effect is one of sadness. And the book itself is a masterly presentment of gloom. Masterly — or most natural: it is often hard to say how much of Hamsun's effect is due to superlative technique and how much to the inspired disregard of all technique. *Den Siste Glæde* is a diary of wearisome days, spent for the most part among unattractive, insignificant people at a holiday resort; the only " action " in it is an altogether pitiful love affair, in which the narrator is involved to the slightest possible degree. The writer is throughout despondent; he feels himself out of the race; his day is past. Solitude and quiet, Nature, and his own foolish feelings — these are the " last joys " left him now.

The book might have seemed a fitting, if pathetic, ending to the literary career of the author of *Pan.* Certainly it holds out no promise of further energy or interest in life or work. The closing words amount to a personal farewell.

Then, without warning, Hamsun enters upon a new phase of power. *Börn av Tilden* (Children of the Age) is an objective study, its main theme being the " marriage " conflict touched upon in the Wanderer stories, and here developed in a different setting and with fuller individuality. Hamsun has here moved up a step in the social scale, from villagers of the Benoni type to the land-owning class. There is the same conflict of temperaments that we have seen before, but less violent now; the poet's late-won calm of mind, and the level of culture from which his characters now are drawn — perhaps by

instinctive selection — make for restraint. Still a romantic at heart, he becomes more classic in form.

Börn av Tilden is also the story of Segelfoss, in its passing from the tranquil dignity of a semi-feudal estate to the complex and ruthless modernity of an industrial centre. *Segelfoss By* (1915) treats of the fortunes of the succeeding generation, and the further development of Segelfoss into a township ("By").

Then, with *Growth of the Soil,* Hamsun achieves his greatest triumph. Setting aside all that mattered most to himself, he turns, with the experience of a lifetime rich in conflict, to the things that matter to us all. Deliberately shorn of all that makes for mere effect, Isak stands out as an elemental figure, the symbol of Man at his best, face to face with Nature and life. There is no greater human character — reverently said — in the Bible itself.

These, then, are the steps of Hamsun's progress as an author, from the passionate chaos of *Sult* to the Miltonic, monumental calm of *Growth of the Soil.* The stages in themselves are full of beauty; the wistfulness of *Pan* and *Victoria,* the kindly humour of *Sværmere* and *Benoni,* the autumn-tinted resignation of the Wanderer with the Mute — they follow as the seasons do, each with a charm of its own, yet all deriving from one source. His muse at first is Iselin, the embodiment of adolescent longing, the dream of those "whom delight flies because they give her

chase." The hopelessness of his own pursuit fills him with pity for mortals under the same spell, and he steps aside to be a brave, encouraging chorus, or a kindly chronicler of others' lives. And his reward is the love of a greater divinity, the goddess of field and homestead. No will-o'-the-wisp, but a presence of wisdom and calm.

THE END